This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Mr. Dickens Goes to the Play

Alexander Woollcott

Digitized by Google

21.+66.49.5

HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY

BOUGHT FROM
THE FUND BEQUEATHED BY

EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)

OF NEW YORK

Digitized by Google

250

Digitized by Google

HALL'S BOOK SHOP

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Dickens in Full Make-Up

(From the Shaw Collection)

Digitized by Google

Mr. Dickens Goes to The Play

By

Alexander Woollcott

Illustrated

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1922

Digitized by Google

Dickens in Full Make-Up

(From the Shaw collection)

Digitized by Google

Mr. Dickens Goes to The Play

By

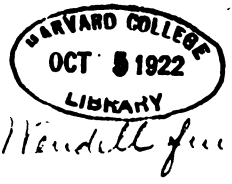
Alexander Woollcott

Illustrated

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1922

Digitized by Google

21466.49.5



Copyright, 1922
by
Alexander Woollcott

Made in the United States of America

Digitized by Google

To

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

My dear Kate Douglas Wiggin:

Surely it is unnecessary to explain why, of all the books I might possibly provoke, this one must needs especially be dedicated to you—you who rode with Mr. Dickens to Portland long ago and told him why you liked "David Copperfield" best of all and what parts of his novels were rather dull and why your yellow dog was named Pip and how your other dog (who had fought with Pip in your garden) was, inevitably, named Mr. Pocket.

Nor need there be any explaining of a Dickens book compiled by one who was brought up on his stories. Without them I should hardly have had the key to all that my grandfather and my mother were wont to say across the head of this young Brooks of Sheffield. One of the last memories I have of my grandfather is of an autocrat of nearly ninety years, sitting fiercely on the vine-hung verandah of his old house down in Jersey. In his declining years he had relinquished little by little the supervision of his farm and his factory. But he still kept an eye on those hollyhocks of his. And no sooner did he suspect the roaming chickens of having designs on them, than up would go his cane in the

Digitized by Google

fashion of a war-club and down the steps he would charge, roaring as he went (to summon aid from whatever stray grandchildren might be within earshot): "Janet, Donkeys!"

But I should, perhaps, tell how this fresh gathering of the Dickens material came about. It really happened last Christmas Eve; when, in the early afternoon, I encountered on Fifth Avenue the redoubtable J. M. Kerrigan of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Kerrigan always has to stop and think when you ask him what country he is in and he has a delightful way of never being committed to any destination. Therefore he was all in readiness when I suggested that we make the round of the studios, he to sing Christmas Waits for our drinks. He sang many old snatches that afternoon.

So it was twilight when, in high good humor, we reached my quarters at last, where I went to work on the tying up of some Christmas parcels and Kerrigan, infected by the spirit of the day, groped instinctively for my set of Dickens on the darkened shelves. I have an indistinct recollection that I caught him looking disappointedly for Micawber in "Dombey and Son." I remember for sure that just when I was lording it over the fellow because he had never made the acquaintance of my friend, Mr. Wopsle, he countered by introducing me to Dullborough Town, which, in all its charm and prophetic humor, had escaped me until that day. Said Kerrigan:

Digitized by Google

"Isn't it a cruel pity that all this Dickens talk and streeleen on the theatre is not caught up in one volume where a man could be finding it of a fine Christmas afternoon?"

Some days later, I poked about in the library in quest of such a book and there was none. So here it is. I hand it to you, knowing you will find pleasure in it, because so many parts of it are beautiful.

I remember, after a matinee of "Justice" in which the audience's interest in Mr. Barrymore's performance had been shared by an equally striking and much more emotional performance in the proscenium box by an actress of note, Barrymore vowed he had never dared dream he would one day star with HER in New York. And I rather suspect Mr. Dickens never guessed he would one day write a book in collaboration with

Your obedient servant,

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT.

New York, 1922

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Immortals	3
The Thwarted Actor	12
The Stage in Dickens's Letters	33
I. The Macready Letters	37
II. Miscellaneous Letters	57
The Stage in Dickens's Novels	83
The Vincent Crummles Company	133
The Dramatizations of Dickens	223
Sleight of Hand	237

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ILLUSTRATIONS

FACING PAGE

DICKENS IN FULL MAKE-UP . *Frontispiece*
(From the Shaw Collection)

SIR HENRY IRVING AS JINGLE 6

CHARLES DICKINS (1839) 12
(Outline of the Painting by Maclise)

DICKENS AS PLAYWRIGHT 16
(From the Shaw Collection)

DICKENS AS STAGE MANAGER 20
(From the Manuscript in the Widener Library, Harvard University)

RELIC OF DICKENS THE STAGE MANAGER . . 22
(From the Widener Library, Harvard University)

MACREADY AS ALFRED EVELYN 46

A DRAMATIZATION OF "A TALE OF TWO CITIES" AT THE LYCEUM THEATRE, LONDON, 1860 . . 224
(From the Shaw Collection)

THE SECOND PRESENTATION OF "PICKWICK CLUB," ROYAL CITY OF LONDON THEATRE, MARCH 28, 1837. THIS RARE BILL ADVERTISES THE SECOND PERFORMANCES OF THE SECOND VERSION OF THE "PICKWICK PAPERS," THE FIRST VERSION BEING THAT OF WILLIAM LEMAN REDE AT THE ADELPHI IN OCTOBER, 1836 230
(From the collection of Milton J. Stone, President of the Boston Branch of the "Dickens Fellowship")

'BOZ'S JUBA SHOWBILL 234

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Mr. Dickens Goes to the Play

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE IMMORTALS

IN the writings of the younger critics and in the small talk of the younger playwrights, there is evidence from time to time of a notion that the theatre of today is something quite apart from the theatre of our grandfathers. You will hear them speaking of the old days with a wondering pity, as of a remote and rather fabulous time and quite as though Ibsen had definitely and finally exorcised some grotesque spirit from the playhouse. It is true that the slamming of Nora's door jarred the house and startled a thousand drowsy fellows into a new wakefulness, but, as with the fleeing Peter Pan when the nursery window was nipped shut after him, so here too, perhaps, something was left behind.

When a younger worker in the theatre is caught red-handed in the act of speaking of naturalism as something invented in the spring of 1896 it is well to take him aside and reread him Hamlet's advice to the players. And it is well occasionally to take all of them by the scruffs of their necks and set them down at the feet of that Eng-

Digitized by Google

lishman who wrote of the theatre oftener and with more insight than any one else of his century or ours.

Turn to his pages and find again how changeless the theatre is. Somehow within its gates time and place lose something of their force. The American adrift in the streets of Paris or Vienna may be conscious of an alien world jostling all around him, but once he crosses the theatre's threshold, he sniffs a familiar aroma and hears a familiar overtone which tell him that here at last is something akin to what he had known back home. Like the gypsies, the people of the stage really know no country, nor can it ever be said of any one of them that he belongs to this decade or that. They all stand a little apart, unfused with the life of the community surrounding them, untouched by the passing years, ageless while the world grows old and tired.

That is why the mummers of Dickens are, in some ways, more vivid and more contemporary than any of his people. Mrs. Gamp, Sam Weller, Uriah Heep, even Trabb's boy, may be receding ever so slowly toward the horizon of the quaint and the half-believable. But not Miss Henrietta Petowker of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, "the only sylph who could stand upon one leg and play the tambourine on her other knee, LIKE a sylph." Not Mr. Wopsle of London and Elsinore. That is why as his motley pageant swaggers by—fading ingénues, embittered translators, wily bill-posters, despondent critics, soiled supernumeraries and all—

Digitized by Google

it is easy for you to remember some perfect counterpart of each and every one encountered the day before on Broadway or the Strand.

Indeed, if some fatuous publisher were ever to order a revision of Dickens in order to bring his tales of the theatre up to date, what could one add? And what could one leave out? Not thrice-gifted Snevellicci's scrap-book of press notices, accidentally left lying around to catch the eye of her handsome caller. Not (while the memory of wartime pilfering is with us yet) the producer who enriched his repertoire by translating pieces from the foreign stage, renaming them and pretending blandly that they were creatures of his own teeming brain.

Not the Crummleses, bless them—neither the permanently arrested girlishness of Miss Ninetta of that tribe, nor the fire and the glint that were in each Crummles eye when word spread backstage from the stalls that a London manager was out front, the dread London manager, who was seen to smile broadly at the antics indulged in by some paltry comedian during Mrs. Crummles's biggest scene. Can't you picture the black look Mr. Crummles gave the wretched offender then and there and the week's notice he gave him as soon as the curtain was down?

It is preposterous to suggest of Mrs. Crummles that she has passed away. A deathless lady, she, and one of a throng of immortals. That complete Dickensian,

Digitized by Google

G. K. Chesterton, has spoken of Dickens as the last of the great mythologists, one who sent out into the world a troupe of fairies, fairies like Sam Weller and Mr. Pickwick, fairies because you cannot, by any feat of the imagination, think of them as having died. If you go in the right spirit any night now to an inn at some English crossroads, says Chesterton, and sit you down over a mug of ale, as like as not the door will swing wide and in will come Mr. Pickwick, spectacles, neckerchief, gaiters and all. And any visitor to New York, loitering along Forty-fourth Street on any pleasant afternoon, is only too likely to encounter Mrs. Crummles out for the air—Mrs. Crummles treading the pavement as if she were going to immediate execution, with an animating consciousness of innocence and that heroic fortitude which virtue alone inspires.

Dear Mrs. Crummles. Her husband saw her first standing upon her head on the butt-end of a spear, surrounded with blazing fireworks. "Such grace!" he used to say afterwards, "Coupled with such dignity! I adored her from that moment."

And all of us have met that changeless camp follower —Mr. Waldengarver's dresser, the one who could see the performance of "Hamlet" only in terms of his own part in it, and who, watching from the wings during the murder of Polonius, felt that his star might have made more of his stockings. "You're out in your reading of Hamlet, Mr. Waldengarver, when you get your legs in profile."

Digitized by Google

Sir Henry Irving as "Jingle"

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Memories of countless rag-tag-and-bobtail productions in our own time are stirred by that performance of "Hamlet."

On our arrival in Denmark [said Pip], we found the King and Queen of that country elevated in two armchairs on a kitchen table holding a court. The whole of the Danish nobility were in attendance; consisting of a noble boy in the wash-leather boots of a gigantic ancestor, a venerable Peer with a dirty face, who seemed to have risen from the people late in life, and the Danish chivalry with a comb in its hair and a pair of white silk legs, and presenting on the whole a feminine appearance. My gifted townsman stood gloomily apart and I could have wished that his curls and forehead had been more probable.

And there is something quite painfully reminiscent about that after-theatre supper when Pip and Herbert took the aforesaid fellow-townsman out for cakes and ale, and, until 2 in the morning, listened (for lack of a chance to get a word in edgewise) to an account of the Waldengarver success and a development of the Waldengarver plans.

I forget in detail what they were [Pip said afterward], but I have a general recollection that he was to begin by reviving the Drama and to end with crushing it; inasmuch as his decease would leave it utterly bereft and without a chance or hope.

Reminiscent, too, of something within the experience of all of us is David's jarring drop to the gray, gritty hubbub of the streets, a descent which is part of the

Digitized by Google

aftermath of every true adventure at the play. And Dickens's own memories of the theatre in Dullborough Town, where he went as a small boy and where he learned as from a page of English history how the wicked King Richard slept in wartime on a sofa much too small for him and how fearfully his conscience troubled his boots.

Above all, the theatre of today can hardly disown the play ordered by Mr. Crummles to be written around the new pump and washtubs he had just acquired for his company.

Nor Nicholas's wonderment as to how he could introduce a *pas de deux* for Folair and the Phenomenon in the scene where Folair as the attached servant is turned out of doors with the wife and child, goes with them into poor lodgings and refuses to take any wages. The neophyte adaptor could not for the life of him see how a dance could be managed.

"Why, isn't it obvious?" reasoned Mr. Lenville. "Gadzooks, who can help seeing the way to do it?—you astonish me! You get,the distressed lady, and the little child, and the attached servant, into the poor lodgings, don't you?—Well, look here. The distressed lady sinks into a chair, and buries her face in her pocket-handkerchief—'What makes you weep, mama?' says the child. 'Don't weep, mama, or you'll make me weep too!'—'And me!' says the faithful servant, rubbing his eyes with his arm. 'What can we do to raise your spirits, dear mama?' says the little child. 'Aye, what *can* we do?' says the faithful servant. 'Oh, Pierre!' says the distressed lady; 'would that I could shake off these painful thoughts!'—'Try, ma'am, try,' says the

Digitized by Google

faithful servant; 'rouse yourself, ma'am; be umused.'—'I will,' says the lady, 'I will learn to suffer with fortitude. Do you remember that dance, my honest friend, which, in happier days you practiced with this sweet angel? It never failed to calm my spirits then. Oh! let me see it once again before I die!'—There it is—cue for the band, *before I die*,—and off they go. That's the regular thing; isn't it, Tommy?"

"That's it," replied Mr. Folair. "The distressed lady, overpowered by old recollections, faints at the end of the dance, and you close in with a picture."

How that little ninety-year-old twinge of dramatic criticism does keep bobbing up in the present-day observations! As when Mr. Zangwill, contemplating a comedy about a serio-comic governess, designed a heroine with a tendency to stop short (right in the dining room or on the street or anywhere) and give imitations. You see, he had written the piece in the hope that Cissie Loftus would play the leading rôle. Or, when Ethel Watts Mumford wrote a comedy about a little exile returning to America from a Continental school, where, among other accomplishments, she had developed some skill at toe dancing. Back home in a great, austere mansion on Long Island, whenever she felt blue, an orchestra would pipe up providentially in the next room and she (shod, as it happened, in ballet shoes) would cheer herself up by a good, heart-warming *pas seul*. That was in a play called "Just Herself," written, or at least rewritten, for Lydia Lopokova.

Digitized by Google

And then there is that story they tell of the English comedy, wherein the distressed heroine, having fled for some reason to Buenos Aires and been pursued there by a lecherous and importunate bandit, finally called out: "Nay, sir, I cannot yield to your desires, but instead I will try to give you my impression of Miss Edna May in 'The Belle of New York.'"

And then there are the Curdles, who are with us yet.

"It's not as if the theatre was in its high and palmy days," said Mrs. Curdle a century ago. "The drama is gone, perfectly gone."

"As an exquisite embodiment of the poet's vision," said Mr. Curdle, "and a realization of human intellectuality, guilding with refulgent light our dreamy moments, and laying open a new and magic world before the mental eye, the drama is gone, perfectly gone."

Who will deny that Mr. Curdle is writing dramatic criticism here or in England today and that Mrs. Curdle is a member of the Drama League? But, there, that shelf of Dickens bristles with texts for every writer on the theatre. Poke your nose into any one of half a dozen volumes and find again how essentially changeless the theatre is. Read Mr. Dickens and rediscover, if you will, its Peter Pantheism. And your own.

In the pages that follow, then, are assembled for your convenience most of what he wrote about the theatre in his books and much of what he wrote in his letters—together with some stray clippings from fugitive papers

Digitized by Google

and a sample of his playwriting for your amusement. Also an account of the plays which, to his great pain, they made from his novels and some study of the suppressed actor in him which kept cropping out to upset his orderly life and distress his orderly friends. It is the theatre of his day and ours, recorded from the stalls, from the pit, from the wings and from what he himself once called "the yellow eye of an actor." Implicit in that record is some of the best dramatic criticism in the language.

Digitized by Google

THE THWARTED ACTOR

CHARLES DICKENS was the most successful and immeasurably the most far-reaching writer born of modern England. From his own country in his own day and from readers in scattered lands the world around came an instant and heart-warming response to his genius which has been matched in the experience of no other writer. That response was not only immediate but personal and affectionate to a degree that only Kipling has since approached and then only under special circumstances and for but a little while. It was an interested affection that swirled and billowed around Dickens all his days on earth and filled those days with a sort of festive hubbub that was most dear to him.

And yet he was never quite happy in his work. He was the most fecund and rewarded of novelists, but it did not content him to be a novelist. There was that in him which could not be satisfied by a writer's career at all. It is impossible to explore far in the half-shrouded byways of Dickens without surprising again and again this secret of his heart—that he wanted to be

Digitized by Google

Charles Dickens (1839)

(Outline of the Painting by Maclise)

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

an actor. Of course he himself used to speak lightly and a little sheepishly of his youthful aspirations for the stage, as of something boyish and amusing enough when viewed in kindly retrospect. Yet these aspirations, or rather the sources of them, never really left him and that they were fermenting away inside him always is readable between the lines even of that eminently discreet but only half-comprehending man Friday of his—John Forster.

It would have been idle to expostulate with him that he could and did reach a far wider audience than any actor might aspire to. It would have been idle to point out how all over England and America and Australia, readers of his, great folk and mean folk, queens and miners and scrubwomen and doctors of philosophy, were laughing and weeping at the promptings of his written word. He knew that well enough. He KNEW it. But he did not FEEL it. He did not hear them laugh, did not see them cry. All the genius poured into "Copperfield" or the tale of Tiny Tim could not bring him the warm, human satisfaction of visible and audible appreciation which was his friend Macready's nightly portion, that really precious reward which only in their more toplofty moments do the actors affect to disprize as when the late Lawrence Barrett, sighing with the extra profundity of a bogus melancholy, would murmur: "What are we poor players but sculptors whose lot it is night after night to carve statues in snow."

Digitized by Google

Had Dickens lived in the twentieth century, the Freudians, taking one shrewd, amused, infuriatingly perspicacious look at him, would have analyzed him on the spot. They would have noted his clumsy efforts at playwriting, his adoration of Macready, his wistful loiterings at the stage-door, of which the faint, unmistakable aroma was ever the breath of his nostrils, and his disarming readiness to laugh and cry at the most ordinary of performances in any theatre. They would have noted his pantomimic gyrations when in the throes of composition. They would have known that the young novelist who walked the night-mantled streets of Paris in an agony of sympathy for the dying Paul Dombey was a sidetracked actor. They would have noted his own incongruous capacity for self-pity, his grotesque sensitiveness to the most piddling of criticism, his comically transparent excuses for appearing in amateur dramatics, his gallant and undeniably Thespian appearance and his flamboyant raiment, geranium in the buttonhole, brilliantine on the hair, rings on the fingers and all, which distressed his sedate friends but satisfied something within him. They would have noted all these things and published in some obscure journal an article written to demonstrate that Mr. Dickens was suffering from an exhibition complex. This would have maddened him. He would have dictated sixteen furious letters demanding retraction, growing the redder in the face as he paced the floor

Digitized by Google

because he would have known that it was all quite true. That half-smothered desire gnawed at him through all the years of his growth until at last it found an outlet which brought him peace.

Charles Dickens's dealings with the established professional theatre were irregular, apprehensive and finally vanquishing, except, of course, that he went a-playgoing in whatever town he visited, whether or not he knew the language and whether or not the bills held forth the slightest promise of something worth a whole evening of a lucid adult's leisure. Even in the days when he was working at that blacking-factory, and earning six shillings a week, you would have seen him in his white hat, little jacket and corduroy trousers, marching up to the ticket booth of some show-van that lay temptingly across his homeward path and boldly planking down some considerable fraction of his income for an hour of contraband entertainment.

Earlier even than that began the itch to write for the stage, for the first works of his pen were tragedies written for performance at home in a nursery packed to the doors with children dragged in from the neighborhood to listen to him. "Misnar, or the Sultan of India," now unhappily lost to posterity, was one of these. It was an itch that troubled him off and on for many years, finding expression in several comedies and burlettas, some of which were produced with moderate success in the days before his name had a little magic

Digitized by Google

for the summoning of an audience. Specifically, these were a two-act burletta called "The Strange Gentleman"; a comic opera libretto called "The Village Coquettes"; a one-act burletta entitled "Is She His Wife? Or, Something Singular"; a short farce, "The Lamplighter"; another (written with Mark Lemon) called "Mr. Nightingale's Diary" and a five-act dramatization of "No Thoroughfare" which he and Wilkie Collins managed between them. Today none of them has any existence in the theatre and none of them has any interest for the Dickensian, except as a curiosity. It should be remembered, however, that they were written in what were the dark days of the English theatre, despite all the glamor lent to those days by the backward glances of George Henry Lewes when, in the fifties, he was, like most dramatic critics before his time and after, earnestly engaged in lamenting the decline of the drama. In that period, Dickens wrote several plays that are now dead. But then no other Englishman in that period wrote a play which is now alive.

That he never succeeded in writing a play which could serve his beloved Macready was a genuine and unassuaged disappointment to him. His reverence for that towering figure of the English stage was a thing which time and his own surpassing success never tarnished. To Macready he dedicated "Nicholas Nickleby." And for Macready's eyes he poured out

Digitized by Google

St. James's Theatre.

Mr. HARLEY,

STAGE-MANAGER,

Has the honor to announce that

HIS BENEFIT

Is appointed for

This Evening, MONDAY, March 13th, 1837,

On which occasion will be performed

IS SHE HIS WIFE ?

Or, SOMETHING SINGULAR!

Alfred Lovemore, Esq. Mr FORRESTER. Mr. Peter Limbury, Mr GARDNER,

Felix Topkins, Esq. (Formerly of the India House Leadenhall Street, and now of Rustic Lodge near Reading,) Mr HARLEY,

Mrs Lovemore, Miss ALLISON, Mrs Peter Limbury, Madame SALA.

Mr HARLEY

Will appear in the Character of

MR. PICKWICK

Make his First Visit

TO THE ST. JAMES'S THEATRE,

And relate, in a Sketch Air, his

EXPERIENCES

IN

"A White Bait Dinner at Blackwall,"

EDITED EXPRESSLY FOR HIM BY HIS BIOGRAPHER

"BOZ!"

The whole to conclude with (by Particular Desire) for the 58th & Last Night this Season

THE STRANGE

Gentleman.

Mr. Quicksilver (Master of a Small Trade on the Basin of Gravesend, & married to the St. James's Arms) Mr HOLLINGSWORTH

John Lovemore (Detained at the St. James's Arms) Mr SIDNEY,

The Strange Gentleman (Just Arrived at the St. James's Arms) Mr. HARLEY

Charles Lovemore (Frequents at the St. James's Arms) Mr. FORRESTER,

Tom Spruce, (a Gay Kind Rustic," at the St. James's Arms) Mr. GARDNER,

John } Waiters at the St. James's Arms { Mr. WILLIAMSON

Tom } Mr. MAY

Will } Mr. COULSON

Julia Bolder (Looking for a Husband at the St. James's Arms) Madame SALA,

Penny Wheedle (Work on Appointment at the St. James's Arms) Miss SMITH,

Mary Wood (Her Aunt understandingly located at the St. James's Arms) Miss JULIA SMITH

Mrs Nickle (late Landlady of the St. James's Arms) Mrs PENSON,

Chambermaids (at the St. James's Arms) Miss STUART

Duet—"I Know a Belle," Miss SMITH and Miss JULIA SMITH.

TICKETS, BOXES, and PRIVATE BOXES, may be obtained of Mr. HARLEY, 12, Upper Gower Street, Bedford Square; and of Mr W. WARNE, at the Bar-Office, at the Theatre, (where places may be secured) every day.

Boxes 5s.--Second Price, 3s. Pit 3s.--Second Price 2s.

Gallery 1s. 6d.--Second Price 1s.

Dickens as Playwright

(From the Shaw Collection)

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

letters a little warmer in their affection than any others which his hospitable heart dictated. I suspect that this chafed Forster just a little and that he was more than a little exasperated by his knowledge that his hero's thoughts followed Macready around the world because Macready represented an achievement that Dickens half-consciously envied.

That Dickens was a natural-born leading man, no one could doubt who has studied the portraits of him, especially the winning Maclise study which caught him in the beauty and but half-conquered diffidence of his youth, the portrait which Thackeray found so amazing a likeness, "the real identical man Dickens, the inward as well as the outward of him." There, visible enough, were genteel comedy in the walk and manner, juvenile tragedy in the eye and touch-and-go farce in the laugh.

And that Dickens had made one direct bid for a place in the ranks at Covent Garden is a matter of record. Years afterwards, he harked back for Forster's benefit to that attempt:

I wrote to Bartley, who was stage-manager, and told him how young I was, and exactly what I thought I could do; and that I believed I had a strong perception of character and oddity, and a natural power of reproducing in my own person what I observed in others. This was at the time when I was at Doctors'-commons as a shorthand writer for the proctors. And I recollect I wrote the letter from a little office I had there, where the answer came also. There must have been something in my letter that struck the authorities,

Digitized by Google

for Bartley wrote me almost immediately to say they were busy getting up the Hunchback (so they were) but that they would communicate with me again, in a fortnight. Punctual to the time another letter came, with an appointment to do anything of Mathew's I pleased before him and Charles Kemble, on a certain day at the theatre. My sister Fanny was in the secret, and was to go with me to play the songs. I was laid up when the day came, with a terrible bad cold and an inflammation of the face; the beginning, by the bye, of that annoyance in one ear to which I am subject to this day. I wrote to say so and added that I would resume my application next season. I made a great splash in the gallery soon afterwards; the *Chronicle* opened to me; I had a distinction in the little world of the newspaper, which made one like it; began to write; didn't want money; had never thought of the stage but as a means of getting it; gradually left off turning my thoughts that way, and never resumed the idea. I never told you this, did I? See how near I may have been to another sort of life.

Years later, when he was reading an ignominiously rejected farce by Bartley, he thought he detected some struggling recognition and connection stirring up within the subconsciousness of that manager. "But," he added cheerfully, "it may have been only his doubts of that humorous composition."

When in the letter just quoted, Dickens said that he had never thought of the stage except as a means of getting money, he was saying what, by every evidence furnished in the acts and works of his life, we know was flagrantly untrue. And furthermore who cannot see that he was saying it *because* it was not true? And

Digitized by Google

knowing all he did know of Dickens's theatrical impulses, the bland Forster still had the hardihood to say that Dickens, in his rebellion against the labor and penury which were the lot of a law court-reporter, had attempted to escape that drudgery "even" in the direction of the stage. That word "even" crept into that sentence, from the same deprecatory impulse which later bade Forster describe Dickens's outbursts of amateur dramatics as "Splendid Stroking."

It wasn't a very good living [Dickens himself observed of the reportorial work] (though not a *very* bad one) and was wearily uncertain; which made me think of the Theatre in quite a business-like way. I went to some theatre every night, with very few exceptions, for at least three years; really studying the bills first, and going to where there was the best acting; and always to see Mathews whenever he played. I practised immensely (even such things as walking in and out, and sitting down in a chair): often four, five, six hours a day; shut up in my own room or walking about in the fields. I prescribed to myself, too, a sort of Hamiltonian system for learning parts; and learnt a great number. I haven't even lost the habit now, for I knew my Canadian parts immediately, though they were new to me. I must have done a great deal: for, just as Macready found me out, they used to challenge me at Braham's; and Yates, who was knowing enough in those things, wasn't to be parried at all.

All of which is quoted at length, less for the specific information it adds, than to ask if it does not suggest something untold, some color for the legend that, at an unchronicled time and place, Dickens did vanish into

Digitized by Google

the personnel of a stock company and try his luck as an actor. Of course that legend took on the accent of certainty in the minds of those players at Portsmouth who, after "Nicholas Nickleby," suspected that the world was laughing at them and who would have it that this Dickens came down there as a would-be-actor and made a sorry mess of it. There is, of course, the specific tradition that he went on unannounced one night during the run of his own piece, "The Strange Gentleman."

But it was rather as an amateur that these instincts of his found their earlier outlet. He never missed a chance at such indulgence, organizing special companies, pretending to be a little bored by them and ending always by directing them himself and attending feverishly to the smallest detail of back-stage management. It was a part of him to plunge with passionate earnestness into these exhausting enterprises, glowering at the more trivial associates who could not, by mere persuasion, be led into taking seriously the exactions of rehearsal and the true agony of performance.

Note the fine and familiar mixture of relish and exasperation in this mid-rehearsal scrawl to the amused Macready. "I never in my life saw a place in such a state or had to do with such an utterly careless and unbusiness-like set of dogs as my fellow-actors." He excepted two, but not Forster, who was engrossed in the rôle of Kitely. "So far as he is concerned," Dickens

Digitized by Google

In Remembrance OF THE LATE MR. DOUGLAS JERROLD.

COMMITTEE'S OFFICE, GALLERY OF ILLUSTRATION,
REGENT STREET.

Friday Nineteenth June 1857.

Proper Dep. Richard Collins

on the Stage - Lent.

Friday 26th June, at 3 in the afternoon

Monday 29th June, at 3 in the afternoon

Thursday 2nd July, at ¼ past 10 at night.

Friday 3rd July, at ¼ past 10 at night.

on Saturday July 4th the piece will be printed for acted here, in the green.

and on Saturday July 11th it will be acted here, in aid of the accompanying Programme.

Dickens as Stage-Manager

(From the Manuscript in the Widener Library, Harvard College)

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

added sourly, "there is nothing in the world but Kitely —there is no world at all; only a something in its place that begins with a K and ends with a Y"—a minor note which does not, by the way, find place in Forster's biography, nor did Mamie Dickens and Georgina Hogarth think it nice to print it in their collection of their father's letters.

It was Dickens who would draw up the rules against talking in the wings, Dickens who blasted the negligent in memorizing, Dickens who wrote out with his own hand the calls and music cues and property lists. Stray leaves from this old book of his life are treasured now in the manuscript collections of the world.

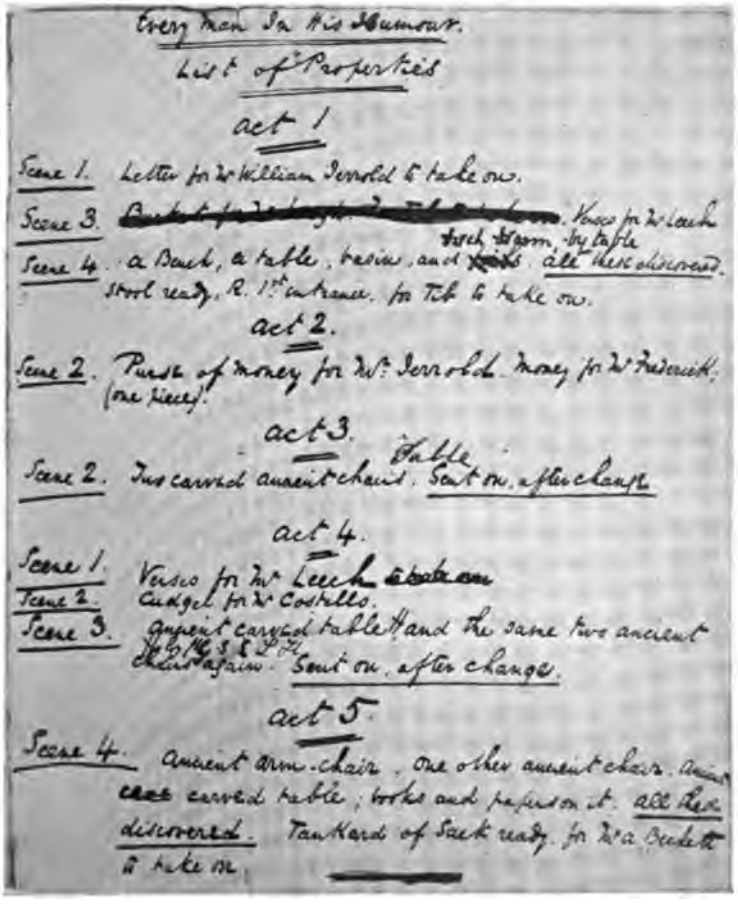
To embark from time to time on such undertakings, he had, of course, to down the questionings in his own mind, the fretting of his anxious publishers and the disconcerting suspicions of his friends, who knew well enough what old impulses he was obeying. Above all, he had to trump up some excuse for publication. For it is not given to the Anglo-Saxon to be able to say frankly: "It is my desire to get up on a lighted platform and make an exhibition of myself, but I cannot do it in a vacuum. I need someone to watch me. Please come and watch me." I remember how, in my Sophomore days at Hamilton College, we organized a dramatic club, engaged a theatre and then were assailed with misgivings which overhung us like a depressing cloud until we hit upon the happy notion of giving our per-

Digitized by Google

formance for the benefit of some local work, it mattered not what. There we were, quite unconsciously inventing out of our own needs, an old thing—a familiar thing to Dickens, certainly, who, for his adventures on the boards, always managed to contrive some plausible cause outside the desires of his own heart. Even when he worked up a monster benefit for poor Leigh Hunt and was bereft of his cause by an unexpected eleventh-hour pension for that gratified beneficiary, he was only momentarily baffled.

How good an actor he was, it is difficult to tell from the written criticism. "Assumption," he wrote, "has charms for me so delightful—I hardly know for how many wild reasons—that I feel a loss of, Oh, I can't say what exquisite foolery, when I lose a chance of being someone not in the remotest degree like myself." (It is, perhaps, worth noting that he invariably used the word "assumption" to cover all activity of disguise or impersonation. This parenthesis is a cross-reference to the phrase, "the Datchery assumption" in his own comment on "Edwin Drood" and is tucked in here for the benefit of the Edwin Druids.) Leigh Hunt wrote that Dickens's Bobadil (in Jonson's "Every Man in His Humor") had "a spirit in it of intelligent apprehension beyond anything the existing stage has known." But Hunt's partiality might well have been challenged. And Victoria, who worked up a considerable trepidation over his performance of Wardour in Wilkie Collins's

Digitized by Google



Every Man In his Humour.

List of Properties

act 1

Scene 1. Letter for Mr William Jerrold to take on.

Scene 3. [redacted]. Vasco for Mr Leech

Scene 4. a Bench, a table, trestles, and [redacted] all these discovered. Stool ready, R. 1st entrance. for Tib to take on.

act 2.

Scene 2. Purse of money for Mr. Jerrold. Money for Mr Fitzwilliam. (one piece).

act 3.

Scene 2. Two carved ancient chairs. Table Seat on, after change.

act 4.

Scene 1. Vasco for Mr Leech to take on

Scene 2. Cudgel for Mr Costello.

Scene 3. Ancient carved table and the same two ancient chairs again. Sent on, after change.

act 5.

Scene 4. Ancient arm-chair, One other ancient chair. Ancient carved table; books and papers on it. all these discovered. Tankard of Sack ready. for Mr a Beckett to take on.

Relic of Dickens, the Stage-Manager

(From the Widener Library, Harvard College)

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"The Frozen Deep," declared that no professional actor then living could have matched him. But somehow one distrusts Her Majesty's æsthetic judgments. However, it is not a bad guess that Dickens was an excellent actor, eloquent, picturesque, moving. And it is my own that had not chance otherwise canalized his great genius, he would have been the overtowering actor of Nineteenth Century England. Which would have been a pity.

But the final and only satisfying outlet for all these impulses was found by another means. That means was foreshadowed in his early craving to read his manuscripts aloud. He took a genuine enough interest, in all conscience, in the sales of his stories as their serial parts appeared, and the rise and fall of those sales was a sure barometer to his spirits. But he wrote not with any such vague and impersonal audience in mind. He wrote for the friend he was going to corner and read his piece to. It was, let us say, Macready's laughter or Macready's tears he hoped to invoke. Indeed, all of this aspect of Charles Dickens lies back of a single sentence he once wrote as a postscript to a letter dispatched from London to his wife at the time when the "Christmas Carol" was still in manuscript. "If," he said, "you had seen Macready last night, undisguisedly sobbing and crying on the sofa as I read, you would have felt, as I did, what a thing it is to have power."

An incident that attended the issue of "The Chimes"

Digitized by Google

is most revealing. In the midst of a long, self-imposed exile on the Continent, he had written that less-persistent of his Christmas stories and, shipping the manuscript on to London, was trusting to Forster's fidelity to revise the proof.

It was on the eve of publication—early in the Winter of 1844–1845—that he suddenly announced a clandestine trip to London, a flying-trip, that was to be imparted only to his cronies and which was to last only a week. Of course Forster wrote back that it would tire him out, that it would cost too much, that it could not possibly be kept secret, etc., etc. And, of course, Dickens paid no attention.

I am still in the same mind about coming to London [he replied]. Not because the proofs concern me at all (I should be an ass as well as a thankless vagabond if they did) but because of that unspeakable restless something which would render it almost as impossible for me to remain here and not see the thing complete, as it would be for a full balloon, left to itself, not to go up.

And later in the same letter out plumped the whole truth.

Shall I confess to you, I particularly want Carlyle above all to see it before the rest of the world, when it is done; and I should like to inflict the little story on him and on dear old gallant Macready with my own lips, and to have Stanny and the other Mac sitting by. Now, if you was a real gent, you'd get up a little circle for me, one wet evening, when I come to town: and would say: "My boy (Sir, you will have

Digitized by Google

the goodness to leave those books alone and to go downstairs—What the Devil are you doing? And mind, sir, I can see nobody—Do you hear? Nobody. I am particularly engaged with a young gentleman from Asia)—My boy, would you give us that little Christmas book (a little Christmas book of Dickens's, Macready, which I'm anxious you should hear); and don't slur it, now, or be too fast, Dickens, please."—I say, if you was a real gent, something to this effect might happen. I shall be under sailing orders the moment I have finished. And I shall produce myself (please God) in London on the very day you name. For one week: to the hour.

And so it came to pass.

From that reading of "The Chimes" came many things. The transition from private readings to public readings given for charity, and thence to public readings given for the lining of his own bottomless purse, was gradual but inevitable. Forster saw it coming and in a sort of panic amassed all the arguments against so undignified a procedure and so wearing an undertaking. He was careful that Dickens should hear of the distinguished ladies who labored "under the impression that *it was to lead to the stage* (! !)." The scandalized italics and the exclamation points (both of them) are Forster's. Forster has recorded his own opposition in these words:

It was a substitution of lower for higher aims; a change to commonplace from more elevated pursuits; and it had so much of the character of a public exhibition for money as to raise, in the question of respect for his calling as a writer, a question also of respect for himself as a gentleman.

Digitized by Google

But do you quite consider that the public exhibition of oneself takes place equally, whosoever may get the money? [Dickens replied]. And have you any idea that at this moment—this very time—half the public at least supposes me to be paid? My dear F., out of the twenty or five-and-twenty letters a week that I get about Readings, twenty will ask at what price, or on what terms, it can be done. The only exceptions, in truth, are when the correspondent is a clergyman, or a banker, or the member for the place in question.

So it went back and forth, all the friends deploring this new misconduct of his, Dickens himself inwardly determined to go through with it. He reared a hundred specious excuses. He laid his intentions to make an exhibition of himself to the widest miscellany of causes. To the melancholy of his home (from which his discarded wife had just moved out for good and all), to the numerical strength of his children, which could hardly be denied. He would sign a contract for each new course of readings, protesting all the while that the work was torment to him, that he longed to stay by his own fireside, that nothing but need of money could induce him to go and so forth and so forth, with never a single mention of the real reason which skulked always in the background, and is visible there even to this day. But the letters he wrote home from his journeys shone with a new content. There was his public all about him, within sight of his own eyes, within touch of his own hands. The sense of them crowding the halls to suf-

Digitized by Google

focation and hanging breathless on his performances warmed his heart as nothing had ever warmed it.

When the boots at Morrison's heard that his Irish hall was packed, he cried, "The Lard be praised for the honor o' Dooblin." When a woman approached him in York, it would be to say, "Mr. Dickens, will you let me touch the hand that has filled my house with friends?" How he loved it! He might write in advance that only the hope of gain that would make him "more independent of the worst," could make him face the travel and exertion and absence—that a journey overseas would be "penance and misery." But, from overseas, he could not help writing, proudly, defensively, revealingly:

I have now read in New York City to 40,000 people and am quite as well known in the streets there as I am in London. People will turn back, turn again and face me, and have a look at me, or will say to one another "look here, Dickens coming." But no one ever stops me or addresses me. Sitting reading in the carriage outside the New York post-office while one of the staff was stamping the letters inside, I became conscious that a few people who had been looking at the turn-out had discovered me within. On my peeping out good-humoredly, one of them (I should say a merchant's book-keeper) stepped up to the door, took off his hat, and said in a frank way: "Mr. Dickens, I should very much like to have the honor of shaking hands with you" and, that done, presented two others. Nothing could be more quiet or less intrusive. In the railway cars, if I see anybody who clearly wants to speak to me, I usually

Digitized by Google

anticipate the wish by speaking myself. If I am standing on the brake outside (to avoid the intolerable stove) people getting down will say with a smile: "As I am taking my departure, Mr. Dickens, and can't trouble you for more than a moment, I should like to take you by the hand, sir." And so we shake hands and go our ways.

The interminable lines at his box-offices, the queue that slept all night on the street in Brooklyn, for instance, gave him a joy that had nothing whatever to do with the dollars they were waiting to deposit to his account.

The career that really began with the reading of "The Chimes" to the little circle in Lincoln's Inn Fields, brought him in huge sums of money and reëstablished his friendship with America. Doubtless, it measurably shortened his days on earth but it satisfied at last the thing within him which had remained unsatisfied ever since that broken appointment between the debonair young reporter and the manager of Covent Garden long before.

They were not quite like anything the world had seen before or anything the world has seen since—those readings, which, literally, were not readings at all. A little like some courtyard or hearth-side performances of the old jongleurs, perhaps, and more than a little like the latter-day appearances of Ruth Draper, who, as Dickens could, can by virtue of her own vivid self and her extraordinary mimetic gift, crowd an empty, sceneless stage with a host of her own imagining. But

Digitized by Google

about them the half-admiring, half-grudging Carlyle shall say the last word here, Carlyle who, under date of April 29, 1863, made this report:

I had to go yesterday to Dickens's Reading, 8 p.m., Hanover Rooms, to the complete upsetting of my evening habitudes and spiritual composure. Dickens does do it capitally, such as *it* is; acts better than any Macready in the world; a whole tragic, comic, heroic *theatre* visible performing under one *hat*, and keeping us laughing—in a sorry way some of us thought—the whole night. He is a good creature too, and makes fifty or sixty pounds by each of these readings.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Stage in Dickens's Letters

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE STAGE IN DICKENS'S LETTERS

THE letters and portions of letters which follow have been chosen from the great volume of Dickens's correspondence, most of which has, at one time or another, been published or partly published. First, in this arrangement of them, come selections from his letters to Macready, offered here not merely because they are abuzz with his interest in the theatre but because they reveal again and again the object of his greatest affection among the men whom he came to know.

It has been necessary to go back of the familiar record in the official family edition of his letters and in the often cryptic pages of Forster's biography. When Mamie Dickens and Georgina Hogarth (his eldest daughter and his sister-in-law) edited their great man's abundant correspondence, there were many passages and often whole letters which were omitted out of discretion, out of timidity, or out of consideration for Dickens's reputation for refined and amiable speech. For example, in a familiar letter written to Macready on November 1, 1854, and touching on a civilian phe-

Digitized by Google

nomenon of the Crimean War quite recognizable to anyone who was alive in the years from 1914 to 1918, you will read this delightful paragraph:

"—— is getting a little too fat, but appears to be troubled by the great responsibility of directing the whole war. He doesn't seem to be quite clear that he has got the ships into the exact order he intended, on the sea point of attack at Sebastopol." But it is when you go to the letter itself in the manuscript vault of the Morgan Library in New York that you find why the name was omitted. It was omitted because the name was Forster.

It is not so easy to see why the woman referred to in another letter as "a very bad actress" should have been veiled for posterity. It was Ristori. Occasionally, the consideration shown was rather for Dickens himself, as where they changed his "bawdy" to "beastly" and, in the same letter—the 1841 Macready letter given here —they omitted bodily the penultimate paragraph. And of course such a letter as the one given here under the presumptive date of 1840 would find no place at all among the official memorials. The omissions are supplied for these pages from the originals which the late Pierpont Morgan collected.

The other letters added are a miscellany of informal dramatic criticism which he would broadcast after any trip to the threatre at home or abroad.

Digitized by Google

I. The Macready Letters

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

I. THE MACREADY LETTERS

THE ASPIRING PLAYWRIGHT

DOUGHTY STREET, 1838.

I have not seen you for the past week, because I hoped when we next met to bring "The Lamplighter" in my hand. It would have been finished by this time, but I found myself compelled to set to work first at the "Nickleby," on which I am at present engaged, and which I regret to say—after my close and arduous application last month—I find I cannot write as quickly as usual. I must finish it, at latest, by the 24th (a doubtful comfort!), and the instant I have done so I will apply myself to the farce. I am afraid to name any particular day, but I pledge myself that you shall have it this month, and you may calculate on that promise. I send you with this a copy of a farce I wrote for Harley when he left Drury Lane, and in which he acted for some seventy nights. It is the best thing he does. It is barely possible you may like to try it. Any local or temporary allusions could be easily altered.

Believe me that I only feel gratified and flattered by your inquiry after the farce, and that if I had as much time as I have inclination, I would write on and on and on, farce after farce and comedy after comedy, until I wrote you something that would run. You do me justice when you give me credit for good intentions; but the extent of my good-will and

Digitized by Google

strong and warm interest in you personally and your great undertaking, you cannot fathom nor express.

Believe me, my dear Macready,

Ever faithfully yours,

CHARLES DICKENS.

P.S. For Heaven's sake don't fancy that I hold "The Strange Gentleman" in any estimation or have a wish upon the subject.

THE DISCOURAGED PLAYWRIGHT

48 DOUGHTY STREET, 1838.

I can have but one opinion on the subject—withdraw the farce at once, by all means.

I perfectly concur in all you say, and thank you most heartily and cordially for your kind and manly conduct, which is only what I should have expected from you; though, under such circumstances, I sincerely believe there are few but you—if any—who would have adopted it.

Believe me that I have no other feeling of disappointment connected with this matter but that arising from the not having been able to be of some use to you. And trust me that if the opportunity should ever arrive, my ardour will only be increased—not damped—by the result of this experiment.

A DEDICATION

BROADSTAIRS, 1839.

Let me prefix to the last number of "Nickleby," and to the book, a duplicate of the leaf which I now send you. Believe me that there will be no leaf in the volume which will afford me in times to come more true pleasure and gratification, than that in which I have written your name as foremost amongst those of the friends whom I love and honour. Believe me, there will be no one line in it conveying a more honest truth

Digitized by Google

or a more sincere feeling than that which describes its dedication to you as a slight token of my admiration and regard.

So let me tell the world by this frail record that I was a friend of yours, and interested to no ordinary extent in your proceedings at that interesting time when you showed them such noble truths in such noble forms, and gave me a new interest in, and associations with, the labours of so many months.

I write to you very hastily and crudely, for I have been very hard at work, having only finished to-day, and my head spins yet. But you know what I mean. I am then always,

Believe me, my dear Macready,

Faithfully yours,

CHARLES DICKENS.

P.S.—(Proof of Dedication enclosed): "To W. C. Macready, Esq., the following pages are inscribed, as a slight token of admiration and regard, by his friend, the Author."

WITH A COPY OF "NICHOLAS NICKLEBY"

DOUGHTY STREET, 1839.

The book, the whole book, and nothing but the book (except the binding, which is an important item), has arrived at last, and is forwarded herewith. The red represents my blushes at its gorgeous dress; the gilding, all those bright professions which I do not make to you; and the book itself, my whole heart for twenty months, which should be yours for so short a term, as you have it always.

WHEREIN MR. FORSTER APPEARS TO HAVE MADE A SCENE

Monday, August 17th (probably 1840)

What can I say to you about last night! Frankly, nothing. Nothing can enhance the estimation in which I hold you, or the affectionate and sincere attachment I bear

Digitized by Google

towards you, my dear friend—and not even your manly and generous interposition can make me eloquent upon a subject on which I feel so deeply and singly.

I am very much grieved, and yet I am not penitent and cannot be, reason with myself as I will. With all the regard I have for Forster, and with all the close friendship between us, I cannot close my eyes to the fact that we do not quarrel with other men; and the more I think of it, the more I feel confident in the belief that there is no man, alive or dead, who tries his friends as he does. I declare to you solemnly, that when I think of his manner (far worse than his matter) I turn burning hot and am ashamed and in a manner degraded to have been the subject of it.

I have found the soul of goodness in this evil thing at all events, and when I think of all you said and did, I would not recall (if I had the power) one atom of my passion and intemperance, which carried with it a breath of yours.

THE PROMISE OF APPLAUSE

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE, Tuesday, November 23d.

MY DEAR MACREADY,

Please be an out and out villain *tonight*.

Faithfully yours always,
CHARLES DICKENS.

MR. DICKENS LETS OFF STEAM

BROADSTAIRS, 1841.

I must thank you most heartily and cordially, for your kind note relative to poor Overs. I can't tell you how glad I am to know that he thoroughly deserves such kindness.

What a good fellow Elliotson is. He kept him in his room a whole hour, and has gone into his case as if he were Prince Albert; laying down all manner of elaborate projects and determining to leave his friend Wood in town when he him-

Digitized by Google

self goes away, on purpose to attend to him. Then he writes me four sides of paper about the man, and says he can't go back to his old work, for that requires muscular exertion (and muscular exertion he mustn't make). What are we to do with him? He says: "Here's five pounds for the present."

I declare before God that I could almost bear the Jones's for five years out of the pleasure I feel in knowing such things, and when I think that every dirty speck upon the fair face of the Almighty's creation, who writes in a filthy, bawdy newspaper; every rotten-hearted pander who has been beaten, kicked, and rolled in the kennel, yet struts it in the editorial "We," once a week; every vagabond that an honest man's gorge must rise at; every live emetic in that noxious drug-shop the press, can have his fling at such men and call them knaves and fools and thieves, I grow so vicious that, with bearing hard upon my pen, I break the nib down, and, with keeping my teeth set, make my jaws ache.

How Abraham must be smoothing his etherial robes to make a warm place in his bosom for the Protestant champions of this time! What joy in Holy Heaven when the angels look down on Sunday mornings and read in bright blue letters that Mr. Westmacott takes their part! Fancy the *Standard*, and the *Morning Post*, the *Age*, the *Argus* and the *Times* all on the side of Christ. Celestial Host!

I have put myself out of sorts for the day and shall go and walk unless the direction of this sets me up again. On second thoughts, I think it will.

SPEAKING OF NATURALISM

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE, 1842.

You pass this house every day on your way to or from the theatre. I wish you would call once as you go by, and soon, that you may have plenty of time to deliberate on

Digitized by Google

what I wish to suggest to you. The more I think of Marston's play, the more sure I feel that a prologue to the purpose would help it materially, and almost decide the fate of any ticklish point on the first night. Now I have an idea (not easily explainable in writing but told in five words), that would take the prologue out of the conventional dress of prologues, quite. Get the curtain up with a dash, and begin the play with a sledge-hammer blow. If on consideration, you should think with me, I will write the prologue.

PROLOGUE

TO MR. MARSTON'S PLAY OF "THE PATRICIAN'S DAUGHTER."

No tale of streaming plumes and harness bright
Dwells on the poet's maiden harp to-night;
No trumpet's clamour and no battle's fire
Breathes in the trembling accents of his lyre;
Enough for him, if in his lowly strain
He wakes one household echo not in vain;
Enough for him, if in his boldest word
The beating heart of MAN be dimly heard.

Its solemn music which, like strains that sigh
Through charmed gardens, all who hearing die;
Its solemn music he does not pursue
To distant ages out of human view;
Nor listen to its wild and mournful chime
In the dead caverns on the shore of Time;
But musing with a calm and steady gaze
Before the crackling flames of living days,
He hears it whisper through the busy roar
Of what shall be and what has been before.
Awake the Present! shall no scene display
The tragic passion of the passing day?
Is it with Man, as with some meaner things,
That out of death his single purpose springs?
Can his eventful life no moral teach
Until he be, for aye, beyond its reach?
Obscurely shall he suffer, act, and fade,
Dubb'd noble only by the sexton's spade?
Awake the Present! Though the steel-clad age

Digitized by Google

Find life alone within its storied page,
Iron is worn, at heart, by many still—
The tyrant Custom binds the serf-like will;
If the sharp rack, and screw, and chain be gone,
These later days have tortures of their own;
The guiltless writhe, while Guilt is stretched in sleep,
And Virtue lies, too often, dungeon deep.
Awake the Present! what the Past has sown
Be in its harvest garner'd, reap'd, and grown!
How pride breeds pride, and wrong engenders wrong,
Read in the volume Truth has held so long,
Assured that where life's flowers freshest blow,
The sharpest thorns and keenest briars grow,
How social usage has the pow'r to change
Good thoughts to evil; in its highest range
To cramp the noble soul, and turn to ruth
The kindling impulse of our glorious youth,
Crushing the spirit in its house of clay,
Learn from the lessons of the present day.
Not light its import and not poor its mien;
Yourselves the actors, and your homes the scene.

TO MACREADY IN AMERICA

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE, 1844.

You know all the news, and you know I love you; so I no more know why I write than I do why I "come round" after the play to shake hands with you in your dressing room. I say come, as if you were at this present moment the lessee of Drury Lane, and had—with a long face on one hand,—elaborately explaining that everything in creation is a joint-stock company on the other, inimitable B. by the fire, in conversation with ——. Well-a-day! I see it all, and smell that extraordinary compound of odd scents peculiar to a theatre, which bursts upon me when I swing open the little door in the hall, accompanies me as I meet perspiring supers in the narrow passage, goes with me up the two steps, crosses the stage, winds round the third entrance P. S. as I wind, and escorts me safely into your presence, where I

Digitized by Google

find you unwinding something slowly round and round your chest, which is so long that no man can see the end of it.

Oh that you had been at Clarence Terrace on Nina's birthday! Good God, how we missed you, talked of you, drank your health, and wondered what you were doing! Perhaps you are Falkland enough (I swear I suspect you of it) to feel rather sore—just a little bit, you know, the merest trifle in the world—on hearing that Mrs. Macready looked brilliant, blooming, young, and handsome, and that she danced a country dance with the writer hereof (Acres to your Falkland) in a thorough spirit of becoming good humour and enjoyment. Now you don't like to be told that? Nor do you quite like to hear that Forster and I conjured bravely; that a plum-pudding was produced from an empty saucepan, held over a blazing fire kindled in Stanfield's hat without damage to the lining; that a box of bran was changed into a live guinea-pig, which ran between my godchild's feet, and was the cause of such a shrill uproar and clapping of hands that you might have heard it (and I daresay did) in America; that three half-crowns being taken from Major Burns and put into a tumbler glass before his eyes, did then and there give jingling answers to the questions asked of them by me, and knew where you were and what you were doing, to the unspeakable admiration of the whole assembly. Neither do you quite like to be told that we are going to do it again next Saturday, with the addition of demoniacal dresses from the masquerade shop; nor that Mrs. Macready, for her gallant bearing always, and her best sort of best affection, is the best creature I know. Never mind; no man shall gag me, and those are my opinions.

My dear Macready, the lecturing proposition is not to be thought of. I have not the slightest doubt or hesitation in giving you my most strenuous and decided advice against it. Looking only to its effect at home, I am immovable in my conviction that the impression it would produce would be

Digitized by Google

one of failure, and reduction of yourself to the level of those who do the like here. To us who know the Boston names and honour them, and who know Boston and like it (Boston is what I would have the whole United States to be), the Boston requisition would be a valuable document, of which you and your friends might be proud. But those names are perfectly unknown to the public here, and would produce not the least effect. The only thing known to the public here is, that they ask (when I say "they" I mean the people) everybody to lecture. It is one of the things I ridiculed in "Chuzzlewit." Lecture you, and you fall into the roll of Lardners, Vandenhoffs, Eltons, Knowleses, Buckinghams. You are off your pedestal, have flung away your glass slipper, and changed your triumphal coach into a seedy old pumpkin. I am quite sure of it, and cannot express my strong conviction in language of sufficient force.

"Puff-ridden!" why to be sure they are. The nation is a miserable Sinbad, and its boasted press the loathsome, foul, old man upon his back, and yet they will tell you, and proclaim to the four winds for repetition here, that they don't heed their ignorant and brutal papers, as if the papers could exist if they didn't heed them! Let any two of these vagabonds, in any town you go to, take it into their heads to make you an object of attack, or to direct the general attention elsewhere, and what avail those wonderful images of passion which you have been all your life perfecting!

I have sent you, to the charge of our trusty and well-beloved Colden, a little book I published on the 17th of December, and which has been a most prodigious success—the greatest, I think, I have ever achieved. It pleases me to think that it will bring you home for an hour or two, and I long to hear you have read it on some quiet morning. Do they allow you to be quiet, by-the-way? "Some of our most fashionable people, sir," denounced me awfully for liking to be alone sometimes.

Digitized by Google

Now that we have turned Christmas, I feel as if your face were directed homewards, Macready. The downhill part of the road is before us now, and we shall travel on to mid-summer at a dashing pace; and please Heaven, I will be at Liverpool when you come steaming up the Mersey, with that red funnel smoking out unutterable things, and your heart much fuller than your trunks, though something lighter! If I be not the first Englishman to shake hands with you on English ground, the man who gets before me will be a brisk and active fellow, and even then need put his best leg foremost. So I warn Forster to keep in the rear, or he'll be blown.

WHILE REHEARSING A JONSON COMEDY

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE, 1845.

Between you and me and that post which is in everybody's confidence I don't think it's a very good part and I think the comedy anything but a very good play. It is such a damned thing to have all the people perpetually coming on to say their part without any action to bring 'em in, or to take 'em out, or keep 'em going.

FROM ONE DANDY TO ANOTHER

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE, 1845.

You once—only once—gave the world assurance of a waistcoat. You wore it, sir, I think, in "Money." It was a remarkable and precious waistcoat, wherein certain broad stripes of blue or purple disported themselves as by a combination of extraordinary circumstances, too happy to occur again. I have seen it on your manly chest in private life. I saw it, sir, I think, the other day in the cold light of morning—with feelings easier to be imagined than described. Mr. Macready, sir, are you a father? If so, lend me that

Digitized by Google

Macready as Alfred Evelyn

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

waistcoat for five minutes. I am bidden to a wedding (where fathers are made), and my artist cannot, I find (how should he?), imagine such a waistcoat. Let me show it to him as a sample of tastes and wishes; and—ha, ha, ha, ha!—eclipse the bridegroom!

I will send a trusty messenger at half-past nine precisely, in the morning. He is sworn to secrecy. He durst not for his life betray us, or swells in ambuscade would have the waistcoat at the cost of his heart's blood.

Thine,

THE UNWAISTCOATED ONE.

TO OLD PARR

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE, 1847.

I am in the whirlwind of finishing a number with a crisis in it; but I can't fall to work without saying, in so many words, that I feel all words insufficient to tell you what I think of you after a night like last night. The multitude of new tokens by which I know you for a great man, the swelling within me of my love for you, the pride I have in you, the majestic reflection I see in you of all the passions and affections that make up our mystery, throw me into a strange kind of transport that has no expression but in a mute sense of an attachment, which, in truth and fervency, is worthy of its subject.

What is this to say! Nothing, God knows, and yet I cannot leave it unsaid.

Ever affectionately yours,

CHARLES DICKENS.

P. S.—I never saw you more gallant and free than in the gallant and free scenes last night. It was perfectly captivating to behold you. However, it shall not interfere with my determination to address you as Old Parr in all future time.

Digitized by Google

TO MRS. MACREADY AFTER THE MACREADY-FORREST RIOTS IN ASTOR PLACE

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE, 1849.

When I came home to dinner yesterday afternoon, I found an American paper from Macready. In the first transports of my unbounded indignation, I was coming up to you: but I thought, on cooler reflection, that there was no reason why I should worry you, in the joyful prospect of his immediate return, with my feelings anent the New Yorkers.

But this I must say—that the scene astounds even me. I know perfectly well that many things may take place in the first city of the United States which could not possibly occur in a remote nook of any other country in the world, but the bestiality of the business, and the incredible baseness of that public opinion to which Mr. Clarke (whoever he is) deferred when he apologized for his engagement, I regard as a positive calamity to the rational freedom of men. To Macready it signifies nothing except that it takes him out of that damnable jumble (you'll excuse me) of false pretensions and humbugs, a week or so sooner. And that's a good thing for all of us.

It strikes me that we ought to have a dinner to him here—just large enough for the proceedings to be made public and no larger—in which this thing should be properly noticed and a reasonable expression of gentlemanly disgust given vent to.

AN ACTOR'S PORTION

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE, 1851.

I cannot forbear a word about last night. I think I have told you sometimes, my much-loved friend, how, when I was a mere boy, I was one of your faithful and devoted adherents in the pit; I believe as true a member of that true host of followers as it has ever boasted. As I improved my-

Digitized by Google

self and was improved by favouring circumstances in mind and fortune, I only became the more earnest (if it were possible) in my study of you. No light portion of my life arose before me when the quiet vision to which I am beholden, in I don't know how great a degree, or for how much—who does?—faded so nobly from my bodily eyes last night. And if I were to try to tell you what I felt—of regret for its being past for ever, and of joy in the thought that you could have taken your leave of me but in God's own time—I should only blot this paper with some drops that would certainly not be of ink, and give very faint expression to very strong emotions.

CHATEAU DES MOULINEAUX, BOULOGNE, 1853.

We are living in a beautiful little country place here, where I have been hard at work ever since I came, and am now (after an interval of a week's rest) going to work again to finish "Bleak House." Kate and Georgina look forward, I assure you, to their Sherborne visit, when I—a mere forlorn wanderer—shall be roaming over the Alps into Italy. I saw "The Midsummer Night's Dream" of the Opéra Comique, done here (very well) last night. The way in which a poet named Willyim Shay Kes Peer gets drunk in company with Sir John Foll Stayffe, fights with a noble knight, Lor Latimeer (who is in love with a maid of honour you may have read of in history, called Mees Oleevia), and promises not to do so any more on observing symptoms of love for him in the Queen of England, is very remarkable. Queen Elizabeth, too, in the profound and impenetrable disguise of a black velvet mask, two inches deep by three broad, following him into taverns and worse places, and enquiring of persons of doubtful reputation for "the sublime Williams," was inexpressibly ridiculous. And yet the nonsense was done with a sense quite admirable.

Digitized by Google

AFTER THE COVENT GARDEN FIRE

49 Champs Élysées, Paris, 1856.

You should have seen the ruins of Covent Garden Theatre! I went in the moment I got to London—four days after the fire. Although the audience part and the stage were so tremendously burnt out that there was not a piece of wood half the size of a lucifer match for the eye to rest on, though nothing whatever remained but bricks and smelted iron lying on a great black desert, the theatre still looked so wonderfully like its old self grown gigantic that I never saw so strange a sight. The wall dividing the front from the stage still remained, and the iron pass-doors stood ajar in an impossible and inaccessible frame. The arches that supported the stage were there, and the arches that supported the pit; and in the centre of the latter lay something like a Titanic grape-vine that a hurricane had pulled up by the roots, twisted, and flung down there; this was the great chandelier. Gye had kept the men's wardrobe at the top of the house over the great entrance staircase; when the roof fell in it came down bodily, and all that part of the ruins was like an old Babylonic pavement, bright rays tesselating the black ground, sometimes in pieces so large that I could make out the clothes in the "Trovatore."

I should run on for a couple of hours if I had to describe the spectacle as I saw it, wherefore I will immediately muzzle myself. All Parisian novelties you shall see and hear for yourself.

ON MACREADY'S REMARRIAGE

Tavistock House, 1860.

I am heartily glad (and not much surprised) to get your letter. You knew that my confidence in you was great as my love for you, and I am thoroughly persuaded that you are right. It is inexpressibly delightful and interesting to

Digitized by Google

me, to picture you in a new life and movement and hope and pleasure about you. This feeling springs up in me for your sake, and for the sake of your children, too. Moreover, I do not believe that a heart like yours was made to hold so large a waste-place as there has been in it. And this consideration, as one in the eternal nature of things, I put first of all.

God bless you, and God bless the object of your choice! Your letter came with the sunshine of the Spring morning, and shone in my heart quite as naturally and cheerily. I have been to Gad's Hill and back, since I received it, and everything has looked the fresher for it in my sight.

Ever, my dear friend,
Your most affectionate,
CHARLES DICKENS.

Aha!—what do you say NOW to those noble remarks I was making at Forster's the other day, about the stout Englishmen all over the world who are always young? I feel a grin of intolerable (except to me) self-complacency mantle all over me as I think of my wisdom.

OFFICE OF "ALL THE YEAR ROUND," 1863.

I have just come back from Paris, where the readings—"Copperfield," "Dombey" and "Trial," and "Carol" and "Trial"—have made a sensation which modesty (my natural modesty) renders it impossible for me to describe. You know what a noble audience the Paris audience is? They were at their very noblest with me.

I was very much concerned by hearing hurriedly from Georgy that you were ill. But when I came home at night, she showed me Katie's letter, and that set me up again. Ah, you have the best of companions and nurses, and can afford to be ill now and then for the happiness of being so brought through it. But don't do it again yet awhile for all that.

Digitized by Google

Regnier desired to be warmly remembered to you. He looks just as of yore.

Paris generally is about as wicked and extravagant as in the days of the Regency. Madame Viardot in the "Orphée," most splendid. An opera of "Faust," a very sad and noble rendering of that sad and noble story. Stage management remarkable for some admirable, and really poetical, effects of light. In the more striking situations, Mephistopheles surrounded by an infernal red atmosphere of his own. Marguerite by a pale blue mournful light. The two never blending. After Marguerite has taken the jewels placed in her way in the garden, a weird evening draws on, and the bloom fades from the flowers, and the leaves of the trees droop and lose their fresh green, and mournful shadows overhang her chamber window, which was innocently bright and gay at first. I couldn't bear it, and gave in completely.

Fechter doing wonders over the way here, with a picturesque French drama. Miss Kate Terry, in a small part in it, perfectly charming. You may remember her making a noise, years ago, doing a boy at an inn, in "The Courier of Lyons"? She has a tender love-scene in this piece, which is a really beautiful and artistic thing. I saw her do it about three in the morning of the day when the theatre opened, surrounded by shavings and carpenters, and (of course) with that inevitable hammer going; and I told Fechter: "That is the very best piece of womanly tenderness I have ever seen on the stage, and you'll find that no audience can miss it." It is a comfort to add that it was instantly seized upon, and is much talked of.

Stanfield was very ill for some months, then suddenly picked up, and is really rosy and jovial again. Going to see him when he was very despondent, I told him the story of Fechter's piece (then in rehearsal) with appropriate action; fighting a duel with the washing-stand, defying the bedstead, and saving the life of the sofa-cushion. This so

Digitized by Google

kindled his old theatrical ardour, that I think he turned the corner on the spot.

With love to Mrs. Macready and Katie, and (be still my heart!) Benvenuta, and the exiled Johnny (not too attentive at school, I hope?), and the personally-unknown young Parr,

Ever, my dearest Macready, your most affectionate,

CHARLES DICKENS.

NIBLO'S GARDEN

SPRINGFIELD, MASS., 1868.

To pass from Boston personal to New York theatrical, I will mention here that one of the proprietors of my New York hotel is one of the proprietors of Niblo's, and the most active. Consequently I have seen the "Black Crook" and the "White Fawn," in majesty, from an armchair in the first entrance, P. S., more than once. Of these astonishing dramas, I beg to report (seriously) that I have found no human creature "behind" who has the slightest idea what they are about (upon my honour, my dearest Macready!), and that having some amiable small talk with a neat little Spanish woman, who is the premiere danseuse, I asked her, in joke, to let me measure her skirt with my dress glove. Holding the glove by the tip of the forefinger, I found the skirt to be just three gloves long and yet its length was much in excess of the skirts of two hundred other ladies, whom the carpenters were at that moment getting into their places for a transformation scene, on revolving columns, on wires and "travellers" in iron cradles, up in the flies, down in the cellars, on every description of float that Wilmot, gone distracted, could imagine!

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

II. Miscellaneous Letters

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

II. MISCELLANEOUS LETTERS

After "The Village Coquettes"

To John Hullah. *1836.*

Have you seen *The Examiner?* It is rather depreciatory of the opera; but, like all inveterate critiques against Braham, so well done that I cannot help laughing at it, for the life and soul of me. I have seen *The Sunday Times*, *The Dispatch*, and *The Satirist*, all of which blow their critic trumpets against unhappy me most lustily. Either I must have grievously awakened the ire of all the "adaptors" and their friends, or the drama must be decidedly bad. I haven't made up my mind yet which of the two is the fact.

The Exorbitant Dramatist

To J. P. Harley. *1837.*

I have considered the terms on which I could afford just now to sell Mr. Braham the acting copyright in London of an entirely new piece for the St. James's Theatre; and I could not sit down to write one in a single act of about one hour long, under a hundred pounds. For a new piece in two acts, a hundred and fifty pounds would be the sum I should require.

I do not know whether, with reference to arrangements that were made with any other writers, this may, or may not, appear a large item. I state it merely with regard to the value of my own time and writings at this moment.

Digitized by Google

The Old Furor

To Professor Felton. *Montreal, 1842.*

I would give something . . . . if you could stumble into that very dark and dusty theatre in the day-time (at any minute between twelve and three), and see me with my coat off, the stage manager and universal director, urging impracticable ladies and impossible gentlemen on to the very confines of insanity, shouting and driving about, in my own person, to an extent which would justify any philanthropic stranger in clapping me into a strait-waistcoat without further inquiry, endeavouring to goad H. into some dim and faint understanding of a prompter's duties, and struggling in such a vortex of noise, dirt, bustle, confusion, and inextricable entanglement of speech and action as you would grow giddy in contemplating. . . . This kind of voluntary hard labour used to be my great delight. The *furor* has come upon me again, and I begin to be once more of opinion that nature intended me for the lessee of a national theatre, and that pen, ink, and paper have spoiled a manager.

An Unborn Play

To Douglas Jerrold. *Devonshire Terrace, 1843.*

Yes, you have anticipated my occupation. Chuzzlewit be hanged—high comedy and five hundred pounds are the only matters I can think of. I call it "The One Thing Needful; or, the Part is Better than the Whole." Here are the characters:

Old Febrile.....*Mr. Farren*
Young Febrile (his son).....*Mr. Howe*
Jack Hessians (his friend).....*Mr. W. Lacy*
Chalks (a landlord).....*Mr. Gough*
Hon. Harry Staggers.....*Mr. Mellon*
Sir Thomas Tip.....*Mr. Buckstone*

Digitized by Google

Swig.....*Mr. Webster*
The Duke of Leeds.....*Mr. Coutts*
Sir Smiven Growler.....*Mr. Macready*

SERVANTS, GAMBLERS, *visitors, etc.*

Mrs. Febrile.....*Mrs. Glover*
Lady Tip.....*Mrs. Humby*
Mrs. Sour.....*Mrs. Clifford*
Fanny.....*Miss A. Smith*

One scene, where Old Febrile tickles Lady Tip in the ribs, and afterwards dances out with his hat behind him, his stick before, and his eye on the pit, I expect will bring the house down. There is also another point—where old Febrile, at the conclusion of his disclosure to Swig, rises and says, "And now, Mr. Swig, tell me, have I acted well?" and Swig says, "Well, Mr. Febrile, have you ever acted ill?" which will carry off the piece.

I walk up and down the street at the back of the theatre every night, and peep in at the green-room window, thinking of the time when "Dick-ens" will be called for by excited hundreds, and won't come—till Mr. Webster (half Swig and half himself) shall enter from his dressing-room, and quelling the tempest with a smile, beseech that wizard if he be in the house (here he looks up at my box), to accept the congratulations of the audience and indulge them with a sight of the man who had got five hundred pounds in money, and it's impossible to say how much in laurels. Then I shall come forward and bow, once, twice, thrice—roars of approbation. Barvyo! brarvo! Hooray! hoorar! hooroar!—one cheer more—and asking Webster home to supper, shall declare eternal friendship for that public-spirited individual, which Talfourd (the vice) will echo with all his heart and soul, and with tears in his eyes, adding in a perfectly audible voice, and in the same breath,

Digitized by Google

that "he's a very wretched creature, but better than Macready any way, for he wouldn't play Ion when it was given to him." After which he will propose said Macready's health in terms of red-hot eloquency.

I am always, my dear Jerrold, faithfully your friend,

THE CONGREVE OF THE 19th CENTURY.

(Which I mean to be called in the Sunday papers.)

P. S.—I shall dedicate it to Webster, beginning:

"MY DEAR SIR—When you first proposed to stimulate the slumbering dramatic talent of England, I assure you I had not the least idea, etc., etc., etc."

ENGLAND ON THE FRENCH STAGE

To Forster. *1847.*

"Clarissa Harlowe" is still the rage. There are some things in it rather calculated to astonish the ghost of Richardson, but Clarissa is very admirably played (by Rose Chéri), and dies better than the original, to my thinking; but Richardson is no great favourite of mine, and never seems to me to take his top-boots off, whatever he does. Several pieces are in course of representation, involving rare portraits of the English. In one, a servant, called "Tom Bob," who wears a particularly English waistcoat, trimmed with gold lace and concealing his ankles, does very good things indeed. In another, a Prime Minister of England, who has ruined himself by railway speculations, hits off some of our national characteristics very happily, frequently making incidental mention of "Vishmingster," "Regeen Street," and other places with which you are well acquainted. "Sir Fakson" is one of the characters in another play—"English to the Core"; and I saw a Lord Mayor of London at one of the small theatres the other night, looking uncommonly well in a stage-coachman's waistcoat, the

Digitized by Google

Order of the Garter, and a very low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, not unlike a dustman.

At the Opera in Rome

To Forster. *Rome, 1853.*

All the seats are numbered arm-chairs, and you buy your number at the pay-place, and go to it with the easiest direction on the ticket itself. We were early, and the four places of the Americans were on the next row behind us—all together. After looking about for some time, and seeing the greater part of the seats empty (because the audience generally wait in a caffè which is part of the theatre), one of them said, "Waal I dunno—I expect we ain't no call to set so nigh to one another neither—will you scatter Kernel, will you scatter sir?"—Upon this the Kernel "scattered" some twenty benches off; and they distributed themselves (for no earthly reason apparently but to get rid of one another) all over the pit. As soon as the overture began, in came the audience in a mass. Then the people who had got numbers into which they had "scattered" had to get out of them; and as they understood nothing that was said to them, and could make no reply but "A-mericani," you may imagine the number of cocked hats it took to dislodge them. At last they were all back into their right places, except one. About an hour afterwards when Moses ("Moses in Egypt" was the opera) was invoking the darkness, and there was a dead silence all over the house, unwonted sounds of disturbance broke out from a distant corner of the pit, and here and there a beard got up to look. "What is it now, sir?" said one of the Americans to another;—"some person seems to be getting along, again streem." "Waal sir," he replied, "I dunno. But I expect 'tis the Kernel sir, a holden on." So it was. The Kernel was ignominiously escorted back to his right place, not in the least disconcerted, and in perfectly good spirits and temper. The opera was excellently

Digitized by Google

done, and the price of the stalls one and threepence English. At Milan, on the other hand, the Scala was fallen from its old estate, dirty, gloomy, dull, and the performance execrable.

Marionettes

To Forster. *Rome, 1853.*

It was a wet night, and there was no audience, but a party of French officers and ourselves. We all sat together. I never saw anything more amazing than the performance—altogether only an hour long, but managed by as many as ten people, for we saw them all go behind, at the ringing of a bell. The saving of a young lady by a good fairy from the machinations of an enchanter, coupled with the comic business of her servant Pulcinella (the Roman Punch) formed the plot of the first piece. A scolding old peasant woman, who always leaned forward to scold and put her hands in the pockets of her apron, was incredibly natural. Pulcinella, so airy, so merry, so life-like, so graceful, he was irresistible. To see him carrying an umbrella over his mistress's head in a storm, talking to a prodigious giant whom he met in the forest, and going to bed with a pony, were things never to be forgotten. And so delicate are the hands of the people who move them, that every puppet was an Italian, and did exactly what an Italian does. If he pointed at any object, if he saluted anybody, if he laughed, if he cried, he did it as never Englishman did it since Britain first at Heaven's command arose—arose—arose, &c. There was a ballet afterwards, on the same scale, and we came away really quite enchanted with the delicate drollery of the thing. French more than ditto.

A French Conjuror

To Forster. *Boulogne, 1854.*

You are to observe that he was *with the company*, not in the least removed from them; and that we occupied the

Digitized by Google

front row. He brought in some writing paper with him when he entered, and a black-lead pencil; and he wrote some words on half-sheets of paper. One of these half-sheets he folded into two, and gave to Catherine to hold. Madame, he says aloud, will you think of any class of objects? I have done so,—Of what class, Madame? Animals. Will you think of a particular animal, Madame? I have done so,—Of what animal? The Lion.—Will you think of another class of objects, Madame? I have done so.—Of what class? Flowers.—The particular flower? The Rose.—Will you open the paper you hold in your hand. She opened it, and there was neatly and plainly written in pencil.—THE LION. THE ROSE. Nothing whatever had led up to these words, and they were the most distant conceivable from Catherine's thought when she entered the room. He had several common school-slates about a foot square. He took one of them to a field-officer from the camp, *décoré* and what not, who sat about six from us, with a grave, saturnine friend next him. My General, says he, will you write a name on this slate, after your friend has done so? Don't show it to me. The friend wrote a name, and the General wrote a name. The conjuror took the slate rapidly from the officer, threw it violently down on the ground with its written side to the floor and asked the officer to put his foot upon it, and keep it there: which he did. The conjuror considered for about a minute, looking devilish hard at the General.—My General, says he, your friend wrote Dagobert, upon the slate under your foot. The friend admits it.—And you, my General, wrote Nicholas. General admits it, and everybody laughs and applauds.—My General, will you excuse me, if I change that name into a name expressive of the power of a great nation, which in happy alliance with the gallantry and spirit of France will shake that name to its centre? Certainly I will excuse it.—My General, take up the slate and read. General reads: Dagobert, Victoria. The first

Digitized by Google

in his friend's writing; the second in a new hand. I never saw anything in the least like this; or at all approaching to the absolute certainty, the familiarity, quickness, absence of all machinery, and actual face-to-face, hand-to-hand fairness between the conjuror and the audience, with which it was done. I have not the slighest idea of the secret.—Once more.

He was blinded with several table napkins, and then a great cloth was bodily thrown over them and his head too, so that his voice sounded as it he were under a bed. Perhaps half a dozen dates were written on a slate. He takes the slate in his hand, and throws it violently down on the floor, as before, remains silent a minute, seems to become agitated and bursts out thus: "What is this I see? A great city, but of narrow streets and old-fashioned houses, many of which are of wood, resolving itself into ruins! How is it falling into ruins? Hark! I hear the crackling of a great conflagration, and looking up, I behold a vast cloud of flame, and smoke. The ground is covered with hot cinders too, and people are flying into the fields and endeavouring to save their goods. This great fire, this great wind, this roaring noise! This is the great fire of London, and the first date upon the slate must be one, six, six, six,—the year in which it happened!" And so on with all the other dates. There!

A Friendly Critic

To John Saunders. *Tavistock House, 1854.*

I have had much gratification and pleasure in the receipt of your obliging communication. Allow me to thank you for it, in the first place, with great cordiality.

Although I cannot say that I came without any prepossessions to the perusal of your play (for I had favourable inclinings towards it before I began), I can say that I read it

Digitized by Google

with the closest attention, and that it inspired me with a strong interest, and a genuine and high admiration. The parts that involve some of the greatest difficulties of your task appear to me those in which you shine most. I would particularly instance the end of Julia as a very striking example of this. The delicacy and beauty of her redemption from her weak, rash lover, are very far indeed beyond the range of any ordinary dramatist, and display the true poetical strength.

As your hopes now centre in Mr. Phelps, and in seeing the child of your fancy on his stage, I will venture to point out to you not only what I take to be very dangerous portions of "Love's Martyrdom" as it stands, for presentation on the stage, but portions which I believe Mr. Phelps will speedily regard in that light when he sees it before him in the persons of live men and women on the wooden boards. Knowing him, I think he will be then as violently discouraged as he is now generously exalted; and it may be useful to you to be prepared for the consideration of those passages.

I do not regard it as a great stumbling-block that the play of modern times best known to an audience proceeds upon the main idea of this, namely, that there was a hunchback who, because of his deformity, mistrusted himself. But it is certainly a grain in the balance when the balance is going the wrong way, and therefore it should be most carefully trimmed. The incident of the ring is an insignificant one to look at over a row of gaslights, is difficult to convey to an audience, and the least thing will make it ludicrous. If it be so well done by Mr. Phelps himself as to be otherwise than ludicrous, it will be disagreeable. If it be either, it will be perilous, and doubly so, because you revert to it. The quarrel scene between the two brothers in the third act is now so long that the justification of blind passion and impetuosity—which can alone bear out Franklyn, before the bodily eyes of a great concourse of spectators,

Digitized by Google

in plunging at the life of his own brother—is lost. That the two should be parted, and that Franklyn should again drive at him, and strike him, and then wound him, is a state of things to set the sympathy of an audience in the wrong direction, and turn it from the man you make happy to the man you leave unhappy. I would on no account allow the artist to appear attended by that picture more than once. All the most sudden inconstancy of Clarence I would soften down. Margaret must act much better than any actress I have ever seen, if all her lines fall in pleasant places; therefore, I think she needs compression too.

All this applies solely to the theatre. If you ever revise the sheets for readers, will you note in the margin the broken laughter and the appeals to the Deity? If, on summing them up, you find you want them all, I would leave them as they stand by all means. If not, I would blot accordingly.

It is only in the hope of being slightly useful to you by anticipating what I believe Mr. Phelps will discover—or what, if ever he should pass it, I have a strong conviction the audience will find out—that I have ventured on these few hints. Your concurrence with them generally, on reconsideration, or your preference for the poem as it stands, cannot in the least affect my interest in your success. On the other hand, I have a perfect confidence in your not taking my misgivings ill; they arise out of my sincere desire for the triumph of your work.

On Goldsmith

To de Cerjat. *Tavistock House, 1855.*

Let me recommend you, as a brother-reader of high distinction, two comedies, both Goldsmith's—"She Stoops to Conquer" and "The Good-natured Man." Both are so admirable and so delightfully written that they read wonderfully. A friend of mine, Forster, who wrote "The Life of

Digitized by Google

Goldsmith," was very ill a year or so ago, and begged me to read to him one night as he lay in bed, "something of Goldsmith's." I fell upon "She Stoops to Conquer," and we enjoyed it with that wonderful intensity, that I believe he began to get better in the first scene, and was all right again in the fifth act.

An Englishman Abroad

To Miss Hogarth. *Paris, 1855.*

The theatres are not particularly good, but I have seen Lemaître act in the most wonderful and astounding manner. I am afraid we must go to the Opéra Comique on Sunday. To-morrow we dine with Régnier, and to-day with the Oliffes.

"La Joie fait Peur," at the Français, delighted me. Exquisitely played and beautifully imagined altogether. Last night we went to the Porte St. Martin to see a piece (English subject) called "Jane Osborne," which the characters pronounce "Ja Nosbornne." The seducer was Lord Nottingham. The comic Englishwoman's name (she kept lodgings and was a very bad character) was Missees Christmas. She had begun to get into great difficulties with a gentleman of the name of Meestair Cornhill, when we were obliged to leave, at the end of the first act, by the intolerable stench of the place. The whole theatre must be standing over some vast cess-pool. It was so alarming that I instantly rushed into a café and had brandy.

My ear has gradually become so accustomed to French, that I understand the people at the theatres (for the first time) with perfect ease and satisfaction. I walked about with Régnier for an hour and a half yesterday, and received many compliments on my angelic manner of speaking the celestial language. There is a winter Franconi's now, high up on the Boulevards, just like the round theatre on the Champs Élysées, and as bright and beautiful. A clown

Digitized by Google

from Astley's is all in high favour there at present. He talks slang English (being evidently an idiot), as if he felt a perfect confidence that everybody understands him. His name is Boswell, and the whole cirque rang last night with cries for Boz Zwillll! Boz Zweellll! Boz Zwuallll! etc., etc., etc., etc.

On Frédéric Lemaître

To Forster. *Paris, 1855.*

Incomparably the finest acting I ever saw, I saw last night at the Ambigu. They have revived that old piece, once immensely popular in London under the name of THIRTY YEARS OF A GAMBLER'S LIFE. Old Lemaître plays his famous character, and never did I see anything in art, so exaltedly horrible and awefull. In the earlier acts he was so well made up, and so light and active that he really looked sufficiently young. But in the last two, when he had grown old and miserable, he did the finest things, I really believe, that are within the power of acting. Two or three times, a great cry of horror went all round the house. When he met, in the inn-yard, the traveller whom he murders, and first saw his money, the manner in which the crime came into his head—and eyes—was as truthful as it was terrific. This traveller, being a good fellow, gives him wine. You should see the dim remembrance of his better days that comes over him as he takes the glass, and in a strange, dazed way makes as if he were going to touch the other man's, or do some airy thing with it; and then stops and flings the contents down his hot throat, as if he were pouring it into a limekiln. But this was nothing to what follows after he has done the murder, and comes home, with a basket of provisions, a ragged pocket full of money, and badly-washed bloody right hand—which his little girl finds out. After the child asked him if he had hurt his hand, his going aside, turning himself round, and looking over all his clothes for

Digitized by Google

spots, was so inexpressibly dreadful that it really scared one. He called for wine, and the sickness that came upon him when he saw the colour, was one of the things that brought out the curious cry I have spoken of, from the audience. Then he fell into a sort of bloodly mist, and went on to the end groping about, with no mind for anything, except making his fortune by staking this money, and a faint dull kind of love for the child. It is quite impossible to satisfy one's-self by saying enough of this magnificent performance. I have never seen him come near its finest points, in anything else. He said two things in a way that alone would put him far apart from all other actors. One to his wife, when he has exultingly shewn her the money and she has asked him how he got it—"I found it"—and the other to his old companion and tempter, when he was charged by him with having killed that traveller, and suddenly went headlong mad and took him by the throat and howled out, "It wasn't I who murdered him—it was 'Misery!'" And such a dress; such a face; and above all, such an extraordinary guilty wicked thing as he made of a knotted branch of a tree which was his walking-stick, from the moment when the idea of the murder came into his head! I could write pages about him. It is an impression quite ineffaceable. He got half-boastful of that walking-staff to himself, and half-afraid of it; and didn't know whether to be grimly pleased that it had the jagged end, or to hate it and be horrified at it. He sat at a little table in the inn-yard, drinking with the traveller; and this horrible stick got between them like the Devil, while he counted on his fingers the uses he could put the money to.

At "Orestes"

To Forster. *Paris, 1855.*

Nothing have I ever seen so weighty and so ridiculous. If I had not already learnt to tremble at the sight of classic

Digitized by Google

drapery on the human form, I should have plumbed the utmost depths of terrified boredom in this achievement. The chorus is not preserved otherwise than that bits of it are taken out for characters to speak. It is really so bad as to be almost good. Some of the Frenchified classical anguish struck me as so unspeakably ridiculous that it puts me on the broad grin as I write.

Next week we are to have at the Ambigu "Paradise Lost," with the murder of Abel and the Deluge. The wildest rumours are afloat as to the undressing of our first parents.

At "Paradise Lost"

To Forster. *Paris, 1855.*

We were rung in (out of the café below the Ambigu) at 8, and the play was over at half-past 1; the waits between the acts being very much longer than the acts themselves. The house was crammed to excess in every part, and the galleries awful with Blouses, who again during the whole of the waits, beat with the regularity of military drums the revolutionary tune of famous memory—Ça Ira! The play is a compound of "Paradise Lost" and Byron's "Cain" and some of the controversies between the archangel and the devil, when the celestial power argues with the infernal in conversational French, as "Eh bien! Satan, crois-tu donc que notre Seigneur t'aurait exposé aux tourments que t'endures à présent sans avoir prévu, &c. &c." are very ridiculous. All the supernatural personages are alarmingly natural (as theatre nature goes), and walk about in the stupidest way. Which has occasioned Collins and myself to institute a perquisition whether the French ever have shown any kind of idea of the supernatural; and to decide this rather in the negative. The people are very well dressed, and Eve very modestly. All Paris and the provinces had been ransacked for a woman who had brown hair that would fall to the

Digitized by Google

calfs of her legs—and she was found at last—at the Odeon. There was nothing attractive until the 4th act, when there was a pretty good scene of the children of Cain dancing in, and desecrating a temple while Abel and his family were hammering hard at the Ark, outside, in all the pauses of the revel. The Deluge in the fifth act was up to about the mark of a drowning scene at the Adelphi; but it had one new feature. When the rain ceased, and the Ark drove in on the great expanse of water, then lying waveless as the mists cleared and the sun broke out, numbers of bodies drifted up and down. These were all real men and boys, each separate, on a new kind of horizontal float. They looked horrible and real. Altogether, a really dull business; but I dare say it will go for a long while.

When Playwriting was a Game of Tag

To Forster. *Paris, 1855.*

As I have no news I may as well tell you about the tag that I thought so pretty to the *Mémoires du Diable;* in which piece by the way, there is a most admirable part, most admirably played, in which a man says merely "Yes" or "No" all through the piece, until the last scene. A certain M. Robin has got hold of the papers of a deceased lawyer, concerning a certain estate which has been swindled away from its rightful owner, a Baron's widow, into other hands. They disclose so much roguery that he binds them up into a volume lettered *Mémoires du Diable.* The knowledge he derives from these papers not only enables him to unmask the hypocrites all through the piece (in an excellent manner), but induces him to propose to the Baroness that if he restores to her her estate and good name—for even her marriage to the deceased Baron is denied—she shall give him her daughter in marriage. The daughter herself, on hearing the offer, accepts it; and a part

Digitized by Google

of the plot is her going to a masked ball to which he goes as the Devil, to see how she like him (when she finds, of course, that she likes him very much). The country people about the Château in dispute, suppose him to be really the Devil, because of his strange knowledge, and his strange comings and goings; and he, being with this girl in one of its old rooms, in the beginning of the 3d act shows her a little coffer on the table with a bell in it. "They suppose," he tells her, "that whenever this bell is rung, I appear and obey the summons. Very ignorant, isn't it? But, if you ever want me particularly—very particularly—ring the little bell and try." The plot proceeds to its development. The wrongdoers are exposed; and the missing document, proving the marriage, is found; everything is finished; they are all on the stage; and M. Robin hands the paper to the Baroness. "You are reinstated in your rights, Madame; you are happy; I will not hold you to a compact made when you didn't know me; I release you and your fair daughter; the pleasure of doing what I have done is my sufficient reward; I kiss your hand and take my leave. Farewell!" He backs himself courteously out; the piece seems concluded, everybody wonders, the girl (little Mdlle. Luther) stands amazed; when she suddenly remembers the little bell. In the prettiest way possible, she runs to the coffer on the table, takes out the little bell, rings it, and he comes rushing back and folds her to his heart. I never saw a prettier thing in my life. It made me laugh in that most delightful of ways with the tears in my eyes; so that I can never forget it, and must go and see it again.

Ristori as "Medea"

To Forster. *Paris, 1855.*

In the day entertainments and little melodrama theatres of Italy, I have seen the same thing fifty times, only not at once so conventional and so exaggerated. The papers have

Digitized by Google

all been in fits respecting the sublimity of the performance, and the genuineness of the applause—particularly of the bouquets; which were thrown on at the most preposterous times in the midst of agonizing scenes, so that the characters had to pick their way among them, and a certain stout gentleman who played King Creon was obliged to keep a wary eye all night on the proscenium boxes, and dodge them as they came down. How Scribe who dined here next day (and who follows on the Ristori side, being offended, as everybody has been, by the insolence of Rachel), could not resist the temptation of telling us that, going round at the end of the first act to offer his congratulations, he met all the bouquets coming back in men's arms to be thrown on again in the second act. . . . By the bye, I see a fine actor lost in Scribe. In all his pieces he has everything done in his own way; and on that same night he was showing what Rachel did not do, and wouldn't do, in the last scene of Adrienne Lecouvreur, with extraordinary force and intensity.

Long before "Secret Service"

To Mark Lemon. *Paris, 1856.*

In a piece at the Ambigu, called the "Rentrée à Paris," a mere scene in honour of the return of the troops from the Crimea the other day, there is a novelty which I think it worth letting you know of, as it is easily available either for a serious or a comic interest—the introduction of a supposed electric telegraph. The scene is the railway terminus at Paris, with the electric telegraph-office on the prompt side, and the clerks with their backs to the audience —much more real than if they were, as they infallibly would be, staring about the house—working the needles; and the little bell perpetually ringing. There are assembled to greet the soldiers, all the easily and naturally imagined elements of interest—old veteran fathers, young children,

Digitized by Google

agonized mothers, sisters and brothers, girl lovers—each impatient to know of his or her own object of solicitude. Enter to these a certain marquis, full of sympathy for all, who says: "My friends, I am one of you. My brother has no commission yet. He is a common soldier. I wait for him as well as all brothers and sisters here wait for their brothers. Tell me whom you are expecting." Then they all tell him. Then he goes into the telegraph-office, and sends a message down the line to know how long the troops will be. Bell rings. Answer handed out on slip of paper. "Delay on the line. Troops will not arrive for a quarter of an hour." General disappointment. "But we have this brave electric telegraph, my friends," says the marquis. "Give me your little messages, and I'll send them off." General rush round the marquis. Exclamations: "How's Henri?" "My love to Georges"; "Has Guillaume forgotten Elise?" "Is my son wounded?" "Is my brother promoted?" etc., etc. Marquis composes tumult. Sends message—such a regiment, such a company—"Elise's love to Georges." Little bell rings, slip of paper handed out—"Georges in ten minutes will embrace his Elise. Sends her a thousand kisses." Marquis sends message—such a regiment, such a company—"Is my son wounded?" Little bell rings. Slip of paper handed out—"No. He has not yet upon him those marks of bravery in the glorious service of his country which his dear old father bears" (father being lamed and invalided). Last of all the widowed mother. Marquis sends message—such a regiment, such a company—"Is my only son safe?" Little bell rings. Slip of paper handed out—"He was first upon the heights of Alma." General cheer. Bell rings again, another slip of paper handed out. "He was made a sergeant at Inkermann." Another cheer. Bell rings again, another slip of paper handed out. "He was made colour-sergeant at Sebastopol." Another cheer. Bell rings again, another slip of paper

Digitized by Google

handed out. "He was the first man who leaped with the French banner on the Malakhoff tower." Tremendous cheer. Bell rings again, another slip of paper handed out. "But he was struck down there by a musket-ball, and— Troops have proceeded. Will arrive in half a minute after this." Mother abandons all hope; general commiseration; troops rush in, down a platform; son only wounded, and embraces her.

As I have said, and as you will see, this is available for any purpose. But done with equal distinction and rapidity, it is a tremendous effect, and got by the simplest means in the world. There is nothing in the piece, but it was impossible not to be moved and excited by the telegraph part of it.

A Contretemps at Covent Garden

To Mary Boyle. *Office of "All the Year Round," 1860.*

I pass my time here (I am staying here alone) in working, taking physic, and taking a stall at a theatre every night. On Boxing Night I was at Covent Garden. A dull pantomime was "worked" (as we say) better than I ever saw a heavy piece worked on a first night, until suddenly and without a moment's warning, every scene on that immense stage fell over on its face, and disclosed chaos by gaslight behind! There never was such a business; about sixty people who were on the stage being extinguished in the most remarkable manner. Not a soul was hurt. In the uproar, some moon-calf rescued a porter pot, six feet high (out of which the clown had been drinking when the accident happened), and stood it on the cushion of the lowest proscenium box, P. S., beside a lady and gentleman, who were dreadfully ashamed of it. The moment the house knew that nobody was injured, they directed their whole attention to this gigantic porter pot in its genteel position (the lady and gentleman trying to hide behind it), and roared with laugh-

Digitized by Google

ter. When a modest footman came from behind the curtain to clear it, and took it up in his arms like a Brobdingnagian baby we all laughed more than ever we had laughed in our lives. I don't know why.

We have had a fire here, but our people put it out before the parish-engine arrived, like a drivelling perambulator, with the beadle in it, like an imbecile baby. Popular opinion, disappointed in the fire having been put out, snowballed the beadle. God bless it!

Over the way at the Lyceum, there is a very fair Christmas piece, with one or two uncommonly well-done nigger songs—one remarkably gay and mad, done in the finale to a scene. Also a very nice transformation, though I don't know what it means.

The poor actors waylay me in Bow Street to represent their necessities; and I often see one cut down a court when he beholds me coming, cut round Drury Lane to face me, and come up towards me near this door in the freshest and most accidental way, as if I was the last person he expected to see on the surface of this globe. The other day there thus appeared before me (simultaneously with a scent of rum in the air) one aged and greasy man, with a pair of pumps under his arm. He said he thought if he could get down to somewhere (I think it was Newcastle), he would get "taken on" as Pantaloon, the existing Pantaloon being "a stick, sir—a mere muff." I observed that I was sorry times were so bad with him. "Mr. Dickens, you know our profession, sir—no one knows it better, sir—there is no right feeling in it. I was Harlequin on your own circuit, sir, for five-and-thirty years, and was displaced by a boy, sir!—a boy!"

An Old Problem

To Bulwer-Lytton. *Gad's Hill, 1862.*

I have considered your questions, and here follow my replies.

Digitized by Google

1. I think you undoubtedly have the right to forbid the turning of your play into an opera.

2. I do not think the production of such an opera in the slightest degree likely to injure the play or to render it a less valuable property than it is now. If it could have any effect on so standard and popular a work as "The Lady of Lyons," the effect would, in my judgment, be beneficial. But I believe the play to be high above any such influence.

3. Assuming you do consent to the adaptation, in a desire to oblige Oxenford, I would not recommend your asking any pecuniary compensation. This for two reasons: firstly, because the compensation could only be small at the best; secondly, because your taking it would associate you (unreasonably, but not the less assuredly) with the opera.

The only objection I descry is purely one of feeling. Pauline trotting about in front of the float, invoking the orchestra with a limp pocket-handkerchief, is a notion that makes goose-flesh of my back. Also a yelping tenor going away to the wars in a *scena* half-an-hour long is painful to contemplate. Damas, too, as a bass, with a grizzled bald head, blatantly bellowing about

> Years long ago,
> When the sound of the drum
> First made his blood glow
> With a rum ti tum tum—

rather sticks in my throat; but there really seems to me to be no other objections if you can get over this.

On Historical Plays

To Charles Fechter. *Paris, 1862.*

I have read "The White Rose" attentively, and think it an extremely good play. It is vigorously written with a great knowledge of the stage, and presents many striking situations. I think the close particularly fine, impressive, bold, and new.

Digitized by Google

But I greatly doubt the expediency of your doing any historical play early in your management. By the words "historical play," I mean a play founded on any incident in English history. Our public are accustomed to associate historical plays with Shakespeare. In any other hands, I believe they care very little for crowns and dukedoms. What you want is something with an interest of a more domestic and general nature—an interest as romantic as you please, but having a more general and wider response than a disputed succession to the throne can have for Englishmen at this time of day. Such interest culminated in the last Stuart, and has worn itself out. It would be uphill work to evoke an interest in Perkin Warbeck.

I do not doubt the play's being well received, but my fear is that these people would be looked upon as mere abstractions and would have but a cold welcome in consequence and would not lay hold of your audience. Now, when you have laid hold of your audience and have accustomed them to your theatre, you may produce "The White Rose," with far greater justice to the author, and to the manager also. Wait. Feel your way. Perkin Warbeck is too far removed from analogy with the sympathies and lives of the people for a beginning.

THE PLAYREADER

To Forster. *London, 1864.*

I have becn cautioning Fechter about the play whereof he gave the plot and scenes to B; and out of which I have struck some enormities, my account of which will (I think) amuse you. It has one of the best first acts I ever saw; but if he can do much with the last two, not to say three, there are resources in his art that *I* know nothing about. When I went over the play this day week, he was at least 20 minutes, *in a boat, in the last scene,* discussing with another gentleman (also in the boat) whether he should kill him or

Digitized by Google

not; after which the gentleman dived overboard and swam for it. Also, in the most important and dangerous parts of the play, there was a young person of the name of Pickles who was constantly being mentioned by name, in conjunction with the powers of light or darkness; as "Great Heaven! Pickles?"—"By Hell, 'tis Pickles!"—"Pickles? a thousand Devils!"—"Distraction! Pickles?"

Again the Playreader

To Charles Fechter. *Gad's Hill, 1866.*

This morning I received the play to the end of the telegraph scene, and I have since read it twice.

I clearly see the ground of Mr. Boucicault's two objections; but I do not see their force.

First, as to the writing. If the characters did not speak in a terse and homely way, their idea and language would be inconsistent with their dress and station, and they would lose, as characters, before the audience. The dialogue seems to be exactly what is wanted. Its simplicity (particularly in Mr. Boucicault's part) is often very effective; and throughout there is an honest, straight-to-the-purpose ruggedness in it, like the real life and the real people.

Secondly, as to the absence of the comic element. I really do not see how more of it could be got into the story, and I think Mr. Boucicault underrates the pleasant effect of his own part. The very notion of a sailor, whose life is not among those little courts and streets, and whose business does not lie with the monotonous machinery, but with the four wild winds, is a relief to me in reading the play. I am quite confident of its being an immense relief to the audience when they see the sailor before them, with an entirely different bearing, action, dress, complexion even, from the rest of the men. I would make him the freshest and airiest sailor that ever was seen; and through him I can distinctly see my way out of "the Black Country" into clearer air. (I speak

Digitized by Google

as one of the audience, mind.) I should like something of this contrast to be expressed in the dialogue between the sailor and the Jew, in the second scene of the second act. Again, I feel Widdicomb's part (which is charming, and ought to make the whole house cry) most agreeable and welcome, much better than any amount in such a story, of mere comicality.

It is unnecessary to say that the play is done with a master's hand. Its closeness and movement are quite surprising. Its construction is admirable. I have the strongest belief in its making a great success. But I must add this proviso: I never saw a play so dangerously depending in critical places on strict natural propriety in the manner and perfection in the shaping of the small parts. Those small parts cannot take the play up, but they can let it down. I would not leave a hair on the head of one of them to the chance of the first night, but I would see, to the minutest particular, the make-up of every one of them at a night rehearsal.

Of course you are free to show this note to Mr. Boucicault, and I suppose you will do so; let me throw out this suggestion to him and you. Might it not ease the way with the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and still more with the audience, when there are Manchester champions in it, if instead of "Manchester" you used a fictitious name? When I did "Hard Times" I called the scene Coketown. Everybody knew what was meant, but every cotton-spin ning town said it was the other cotton-spinning town.

Digitized by Google

The Stage in Dickens's Novels

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE STAGE IN DICKENS'S NOVELS

ASTLEY'S

WE never see any very large, staring, black Roman capitals, in a book, or shop-window, or placarded on a wall, without their immediately recalling to our mind an indistinct and confused recollection of the time when we were first initiated in the mysteries of the alphabet. We almost fancy we see the pin's point following the letter, to impress its form more strongly on our bewildered imagination; and wince involuntarily, as we remember the hard knuckles with which the reverend old lady who instilled into our mind the first principles of education for ninepence per week, or ten and sixpence per quarter, was wont to poke our juvenile head occasionally, by way of adjusting the confusion of ideas in which we were generally involved. The same kind of feeling pursues us in many other instances, but there is no place which recalls so strongly our recollections of childhood as Astley's. It was not a "Royal Amphitheatre" in those days, nor had Ducrow arisen to shed the light of classic taste and portable gas over the sawdust of the circus; but the whole character of the place was the same, the pieces were the same, the clown's jokes were the same, the riding-masters were equally grand, the comic performers equally witty, the tragedians equally hoarse, and the "highly-trained chargers" equally spirited. Astley's has altered for the better—we have changed for the worse.

Digitized by Google

Our histrionic taste is gone, and with shame we confess, that we are far more delighted and amused with the audience, than with the pageantry we once so highly appreciated.

We like to watch a regular Astley's party in the Easter or Midsummer holidays—pa and ma, and nine or ten children, varying from five foot six to two foot eleven: from fourteen years of age to four. We had just taken our seat in one of the boxes, in the centre of the house, the other night, when the next was occupied by just such a party as we should have attempted to describe, had we depicted our *beau idéal* of a group of Astley's visitors.

First of all, there came three little boys and a little girl, who, in pursuance of pa's directions, issued in a very audible voice from the box-door, occupied the front row; then two more little girls were ushered in by a young lady, evidently the governess. Then came three more little boys, dressed like the first, in blue jackets and trousers, with lay-down shirt-collars: then a child in a braided frock, and high state of astonishment, with very large round eyes, opened to their utmost width, was lifted over the seats—a process which occasioned a considerable display of little pink legs—then came ma and pa, and then the eldest son, a boy of fourteen years old, who was evidently trying to look as if he did not belong to the family.

The first five minutes were occupied in taking the shawls off the little girls, and adjusting the bows which ornamented their hair; then it was providentially discovered that one of the little boys was seated behind a pillar and could not see, so the governess was stuck behind the pillar, and the boy lifted into her place. Then pa drilled the boys, and directed the stowing away of their pocket-handkerchiefs, and ma having first nodded and winked to the governess to pull the girls' frocks a little more off their shoulders, stood up to review the little troop—an inspection which appeared to terminate much to her own satisfaction, for she looked with

Digitized by Google

a complacent air at pa, who was standing up at the further end of the seat. Pa returned the glance, and blew his nose very emphatically; and the poor governess peeped out from behind the pillar, and timidly tried to catch ma's eye, with a look expressive of her high admiration of the whole family. Then two of the little boys who had been discussing the point whether Astley's was more than twice as large as Drury Lane, agreed to refer it to "George" for his decision; at which "George," who was no other than the young gentleman before noticed, waxed indignant, and remonstrated in no very gentle terms on the gross impropriety of having his name repeated in so loud a voice at a public place, on which all the children laughed very heartily, and one of the little boys wound up by expressing his opinion, that "George began to think himself quite a man now," whereupon both pa and ma laughed too; and George (who carried a dress cane and was cultivating whiskers) muttered that "William always was encouraged in his impertinence"; and assumed a look of profound contempt, which lasted the whole evening.

The play began, and the interest of the little boys knew no bounds. Pa was clearly interested too, although he very unsuccessfully endeavoured to look as if he wasn't. As for ma, she was perfectly overcome by the drollery of the principal comedian, and laughed till every one of the immense bows on her ample cap trembled, at which the governess peeped out from behind the pillar again, and whenever she could catch ma's eye, put her handkerchief to her mouth, and appeared, as in duty bound, to be in convulsions of laughter also. Then when the man in the splendid armour vowed to rescue the lady or perish in the attempt, the little boys applauded vehemently, especially one little fellow who was apparently on a visit to the family, and had been carrying on a child's flirtation, the whole evening, with a small coquette of twelve years old, who looked like a model of

Digitized by Google

her mamma on a reduced scale; and who, in common with the other little girls (who, generally speaking, have even more coquettishness about them than much older ones), looked very properly shocked, when the knight's squire kissed the princess's confidential chambermaid.

When the scenes in the circle commenced, the children were more delighted than ever; and the wish to see what was going forward, completely conquering pa's dignity, he stood up in the box, and applauded as loudly as any of them. Between each feat of horsemanship, the governess leant across to ma, and retailed the clever remarks of the children on that which had preceded: and ma, in the openness of her heart, offered the governess an acidulated drop, and the governess, gratified to be taken notice of, retired behind her pillar again with a brighter countenance: and the whole party seemed quite happy, except the exquisite in the back of the box, who, being too grand to take any interest in the children, and too insignificant to be taken notice of by anybody else, occupied himself, from time to time, in rubbing the place where the whiskers ought to be, and was completely alone in his glory.

We defy any one who has been to Astley's two or three times, and is consequently capable of appreciating the perseverance with which precisely the same jokes are repeated night after night, and season after season, not to be amused with one part of the performances at least—we mean the scenes in the circle. For ourself, we know that when the hoop, composed of jets of gas, is let down, the curtain drawn up for the convenience of the half-price on their ejectment from the ring, the orange-peel cleared away, and the sawdust shaken, with mathematical precision, into a complete circle, we feel as much enlivened as the youngest child present; and actually join in the laugh which follows the clown's shrill shout of "Here we are!" just for old acquaintance' sake. Nor can we quite divest ourself of our old feel-

Digitized by Google

ing of reverence for the riding-master, who follows the clown with a long whip in his hand, and bows to the audience with graceful dignity. He is none of your second-rate riding-masters in nankeen dressing-gowns, with brown frogs, but the regular gentleman-attendant on the principal riders, who always wears a military uniform with a table-cloth inside the breast of the coat, in which costume he forcibly reminds one of a fowl trussed for roasting. He is—but why should we attempt to describe that of which no description can convey an adequate idea? Everybody knows the man, and everybody remembers his polished boots, his graceful demeanour, stiff, as some misjudging persons have in their jealousy considered it, and the splendid head of black hair, parted high on the forehead, to impart to the countenance an appearance of deep thought and poetic melancholy. His soft and pleasing voice, too, is in perfect unison with his noble bearing, as he humours the clown by indulging in a little badinage; and the striking recollection of his own dignity, with which he exclaims, "Now, sir, if you please, inquire for Miss Woolford, sir," can never be forgotten. The graceful air, too, with which he introduces Miss Woolford into the arena, and, after assisting her to the saddle, follows her fairy courser round the circle, can never fail to create a deep impression in the bosom of every female servant present.

When Miss Woolford, and the horse and the orchestra, all stop together to take breath he urbanely takes part in some such dialogue as the following (commenced by the clown): "I say, sir!"—"Well, sir?" (it's always conducted in the politest manner)—"Did you ever happen to hear I was in the army, sir?"—"No, sir."—"Oh, yes, sir—I can go through my exercise, sir."—"Indeed, sir!"—"Shall I do it now, sir?"—"If you please, sir; come, sir—make haste" (a cut with the long whip, and "Ha' done now—I don't like it," from the clown). Here the clown throws himself on

Digitized by Google

the ground, and goes through a variety of gymnastic convulsions, doubling himself up, and untying himself again, and making himself look very like a man in the most hopeless extreme of human agony, to the vociferous delight of the gallery, until he is interrupted by a second cut from the long whip, and a request to see "what Miss Woolford's stopping for?" On which, to the inexpressible mirth of the gallery, he exclaims, "Now, Miss Woolford, what can I come for to go, for to fetch, for to bring, for to carry, for to do for you, ma'am?" On the lady's announcing with a sweet smile that she wants the two flags, they are, with sundry grimaces, procured and handed up; the clown facetiously observing after the performance of the latter ceremony—"He he, oh! I say, sir, Miss Woolford knows me; she smiled at me." Another cut from the whip, a burst from the orchestra, a start from the horse, and round goes Miss Woolford again on her graceful performance, to the delight of every member of the audience, young or old. The next pause affords an opportunity for similar witticisms, the only additional fun being that of the clown making ludicrous grimaces at the riding-master every time his back is turned; and finally quitting the circle by jumping over his head, having previously directed his attention another way.

Did any of our readers ever notice the class of people, who hang about the stage-doors of our minor theatres in the day-time? You will rarely pass one of these entrances without seeing a group of three or four men conversing on the pavement, with an indescribable public-house-parlour swagger, and a kind of conscious air peculiar to people of this description. They always seem to think they are exhibiting; the lamps are ever before them. That young fellow in the faded brown coat, and very full light green trousers, pulls down the wristbands of his check shirt, as ostentatiously as if it were of the finest linen, and cocks the white hat of the summer-before-last as knowingly over his

Digitized by Google

right eye, as if it were a purchase of yesterday. Look at the dirty white Berlin gloves, and the cheap silk handkerchief stuck in the bosom of his threadbare coat. Is it possible to see him for an instant, and not come to the conclusion that he is the walking gentleman who wears a blue surtout, clean collar, and white trousers, for half an hour, and then shrinks into his worn-out scanty clothes: who has to boast night after night of his splendid fortune, with the painful consciousness of a pound a week and his boots to find; to talk of his father's mansion in the country, with a dreary recollection of his own two-pair back, in the New Cut; and to be envied and flattered as the favoured lover of a rich heiress, remembering all the while that the ex-dancer at home is in the family way, and out of an engagement?

Next to him, perhaps, you will see a thin pale man, with a very long face, in a suit of shining black, thoughtfully knocking that part of his boot which once had a heel, with an ash stick. He is the man who does the heavy business, such as prosy fathers, virtuous servants, curates, landlords, and so forth.

By the way, talking of fathers, we should very much like to see some piece in which all the dramatis personæ were orphans. Fathers are invariably great nuisances on the stage, and always have to give the hero or heroine a long explanation of what was done before the curtain rose, usually commencing with "It is now nineteen years, my dear child, since your blessed mother (here the old villain's voice falters) confided you to my charge. You were then an infant," &c., &c. Or else they have to discover, all of a sudden, that somebody whom they have been in constant communication with, during three long acts, without the slightest supicion, is their own child, in which case they exclaim, "Ah! what do I see? This bracelet! That smile! These documents! Those eyes! Can I believe my senses?—It must be!—Yes—it is, it is my child!"—"My father!"

Digitized by Google

exclaims the child; and they fall into each other's arms, and look over each other's shoulders, and the audience give three rounds of applause.

To return from this digression, we were about to say that these are the sort of people whom you see talking, and attitudinising, outside the stage-doors of our minor theatres. At Astley's they are always more numerous than at any other place. There is generally a groom or two, sitting on the window-sill, and two or three dirty shabby-genteel men in checked neckerchiefs, and sallow linen, lounging about, and carrying, perhaps, under one arm, a pair of stage shoes badly wrapped up in a piece of old newspaper. Some years ago we used to stand looking, open-mouthed, at these men, with a feeling of mysterious curiosity, the very recollection of which provokes a smile at the moment we are writing. We could not believe that the beings of light and elegance, in milk-white tunics, salmon-coloured legs, and blue scarfs, who flitted on sleek cream-coloured horses before our eyes at night, with all the aid of lights, music, and artificial flowers, could be the pale, dissipated-looking creatures we beheld by day.

We can hardly believe it now. Of the lower class of actors we have seen something, and it requires no great exercise of imagination to identify the walking gentleman with the "dirty swell," the comic singer with the public-house chairman, or the leading tragedian with drunkenness and distress; but these other men are mysterious beings, never seen out of the ring, never beheld but in the costume of gods and sylphs. With the exception of Ducrow, who can scarcely be classed among them, who ever knew a rider at Astley's, or saw him but on horseback? Can our friend in the military uniform, ever appear in threadbare attire, or descend to the comparatively un-wadded costume of every-day life? Impossible! We cannot—we will not—believe it.

From "Sketches by Boz."

Digitized by Google

Private Theatres

"RICHARD THE THIRD.—DUKE OF GLO'STER, 2*l*; EARL OF RICHMOND, 1*l*.; DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM, 15*s*.; CATESBY, 12*s*.; TRESSEL, 10*s*. 6*d*.; LORD STANLEY, 5*s*.; LORD MAYOR OF LONDON, 2*s*. 6*d*."

Such are the written placards wafered up in the gentlemen's dressing-room, or the green-room (where there is any), at a private theatre; and such are the sums extracted from the shop-till, or overcharged in the office expenditure, by the donkeys who are prevailed upon to pay for permission to exhibit their lamentable ignorance and boobyism on the stage of a private theatre. This they do, in proportion to the scope afforded by the character for the display of their imbecility. For instance, the Duke of Glo'ster is well worth two pounds, because he has it all to himself; he must wear a real sword, and what is better still, he must draw it several times in the course of the piece. The soliloquies alone are well worth fifteen shillings; then there is the stabbing King Henry—decidedly cheap at three-and-sixpence, that's eighteen-and-sixpence; bullying the coffin-bearers—say eighteen-pence, though it's worth much more—that's a pound. Then the love scene with Lady Ann, and the bustle of the fourth act can't be dear at ten shillings more—that's only one pound ten, including the "off with his head!"—which is sure to bring down the applause, and it is very easy to do—"Orf with his ed" (very quick and loud;—then slow and sneeringly)—"So much for Bu-u-u-uckingham!" Lay the emphasis on the "uck;" get yourself gradually into a corner, and work with your right hand, while you're saying it, as if you were feeling your way, and it's sure to do. The tent scene is confessedly worth half-a-sovereign, and so you have the fight in, gratis, and everybody knows what an effect may be produced by a good combat. One—two—three—four—over; then, one—two—three

Digitized by Google

—four—under; then thrust; then dodge and slide about; then fall down on one knee; then fight upon it, and then get up again and stagger. You may keep on doing this, as long as it seems to take—say ten minutes—and then fall down (backwards, if you can manage it without hurting yourself), and die game: nothing like it for producing an effect. They always do it at Astley's and Sadler's Wells, and if they don't know how to do this sort of thing, who in the world does? A small child, or a female in white, increases the interest of a combat materially—indeed, we are not aware that a regular legitimate terrific broadsword combat could be done without; but it would be rather difficult, and somewhat unusual, to introduce this effect in the last scene of Richard the Third, so the only thing to be done is, just to make the best of a bad bargain, and be as long as possible fighting it out.

The principal patrons of private theatres are dirty boys, low copying-clerks in attorneys' offices, capacious-headed youths from city counting-houses, Jews whose business, as lenders of fancy dresses, is a sure passport to the amateur stage, shop-boys who now and then mistake their masters' money for their own; and a choice miscellany of idle vagabonds. The proprietor of a private theatre may be an ex-scene-painter, a low coffee-house-keeper, a disappointed eighth-rate actor, a retired smuggler, or uncertificated bankrupt. The theatre itself may be in Catherine Street, Strand, the purlieus of the city, the neighbourhood of Gray's Inn Lane, or the vicinity of Sadler's Wells; or it may, perhaps, form the chief nuisance of some shabby street, on the Surrey side of Waterloo Bridge.

The lady performers pay nothing for their characters, and it is needless to add, are usually selected from one class of society; the audiences are necessarily of much the same character as the performers, who receive, in return for their contributions to the management, tickets to the amount of the money they pay.

Digitized by Google

All the minor theatres in London, especially the lowest, constitute the centre of a little stage-struck neighbourhood. Each of them has an audience exclusively its own; and at any you will see dropping into the pit at half-price, or swaggering into the back of a box, if the price of admission be a reduced one, divers boys of from fifteen to twenty-one years of age, who throw back their coat and turn up their wristbands, after the portraits of Count D'Orsay, hum tunes and whistle when the curtain is down, by way of persuading the people near them, that they are not at all anxious to have it up again, and speak familiarly of the inferior performers as Bill Such-a-one, and Ned So-and-so, or tell each other how a new piece called *The Unknown Bandit of the Invisible Cavern*, is in rehearsal; how Mister Palmer is to play *The Unknown Bandit;* how Charley Scarton is to take the part of an English sailor, and fight a broadsword combat with six unknown bandits, at one and the same time (one theatrical sailor is always equal to half a dozen men at least); how Mister Palmer and Charley Scarton are to go through a double hornpipe in fetters in the second act; how the interior of the invisible cavern is to occupy the whole extent of the stage; and other town-surprising theatrical announcements. These gentlemen are the amateurs—the *Richards*, *Shylocks*, *Beverleys*, and *Othellos*—the *Young Dorntons*, *Rovers*, *Captain Absolutes*, and *Charles Surfaces*—of a private theatre.

See them at the neighbouring public-house or the theatrical coffee-shop! They are the kings of the place, supposing no real performers to be present; and roll about, hats on one side, and arms a-kimbo, as if they had actually come into possession of eighteen shillings a week, and a share of a ticket night. If one of them does but know an Astley's supernumerary he is a happy fellow. The mingled air of envy and admiration with which his companions will regard him, as he converses familiarly with some mouldy-looking

Digitized by Google

man in a fancy neckerchief, whose partially corked eyebrows, and half-rouged face, testify to the fact of his having just left the stage or the circle, sufficiently shows in what high admiration these public characters are held.

With the double view of guarding against the discovery of friends or employers, and enhancing the interest of an assumed character, by attaching a high-sounding name to its representative, these geniuses assume fictitious names, which are not the least amusing part of the play-bill of a private theatre. Belville, Melville, Treville, Berkeley, Randolph, Byron, St. Clair, and so forth, are among the humblest; and the less imposing titles of Jenkins, Walker, Thomson, Barker, Solomons, &c. are completely laid aside. There is something imposing in this, and it is an excellent apology for shabbiness into the bargain. A shrunken, faded coat, a decayed hat, a patched and soiled pair of trousers—nay, even a very dirty shirt (and none of these appearances are very uncommon among the members of the *corps dramatique*), may be worn for the purpose of disguise, and to prevent the remotest chance of recognition. Then it prevents any troublesome inquiries or explanations about employment and pursuits; everybody is a gentleman at large for the occasion, and there are none of those unpleasant and unnecessary distinctions to which even genius must occasionally succumb elsewhere. As to the ladies (God bless them), they are quite above any formal absurdities; the mere circumstance of your being behind the scenes is a sufficient introduction to their society—for of course they know that none but strictly respectable persons would be admitted into that close fellowship with them, which acting engenders. They place implicit reliance on the manager, no doubt; and as to the manager, he is all affability when he knows you well,—or, in other words, when he has pocketed your money once, and entertains confident hopes of doing so again.

Digitized by Google

A quarter before eight—there will be a full house to-night—six parties in the boxes, already; four little boys and a woman in the pit; and two fiddles and a flute in the orchestra who have got through five overtures since seven o'clock (the hour fixed for the commencement of the performances), and have just begun the sixth. There will be plenty of it, though, when it does begin, for there is enough in the bill to last six hours at least.

That gentleman in the white hat and checked shirt, brown coat and brass buttons, lounging behind the stage-box on the O. P. side, is Mr. Horatio St. Julien, alias Jem Larkins. His line is genteel comedy—his father's, coal and potato. He *does* Alfred Highflier in the last piece, and very well he'll do it—at the price. The party of gentlemen in the opposite box, to whom he has just nodded, are friends and supporters of Mr. Beverley (otherwise Loggins), the *Macbeth* of the night. You observe their attempts to appear easy and gentlemanly, each member of the party, with his feet cocked upon the cushion in front of the box! They let them do these things here, upon the same humane principle which permits poor people's children to knock double knocks at the door of an empty house—because they can't do it anywhere else. The two stout men in the centre box, with an opera-glass ostentatiously placed before them, are friends of the proprietor—opulent country managers, as he confidentially informs every individual among the crew behind the curtain—opulent country managers looking out for recruits; a representation which Mr. Nathan, the dresser, who is in the manager's interest, and has just arrived with the costumes, offers to confirm upon oath if required—corroborative evidence, however, is quite unnecessary, for the gulls believe it at once.

The stout Jewess who has just entered is the mother of the pale bony little girl, with the necklace of blue glass beads, sitting by her; she is being brought up to "the profession."

Digitized by Google

Pantomime is to be her line, and she is coming out to-night, in a hornpipe after the tragedy. The short thin man beside Mr. St. Julien, whose white face is so deeply seared with the small-pox, and whose dirty shirt-front is inlaid with open-work, and embossed with coral studs like ladybirds, is the low comedian and comic singer of the establishment. The remainder of the audience—a tolerably numerous one by this time—are a motley group of dupes and blackguards.

The foot-lights have just made their appearance: the wicks of the six little oil lamps round the only tier of boxes are being turned up, and the additional light thus afforded serves to show the presence of dirt, and absence of paint, which forms a prominent feature in the audience part of the house. As these preparations, however, announce the speedy commencement of the play, let us take a peep "behind," previous to the ringing-up.

The little narrow passages beneath the stage are neither especially clean nor too brilliantly lighted; and the absence of any flooring, together with the damp mildewy smell which pervades the place, does not conduce in any great degree to their comfortable appearance. Don't fall over this plate basket—it's one of the "properties"—the caldron for the witches' cave; and the three uncouth-looking figures, with broken clothes-props in their hands, who are drinking gin-and-water out of a pint pot, are the weird sisters. This miserable room, lighted by candles in sconces placed at lengthened intervals round the wall, is the dressing-room, common to the gentlemen performers, and the square hole in the ceiling is *the* trap-door of the stage above. You will observe that the ceiling is ornamented with the beams that support the boards, and tastefully hung with cobwebs.

The characters in the tragedy are all dressed, and their own clothes are scattered in hurried confusion over the wooden dresser which surrounds the room. That snuff-shop-looking figure, in front of the glass, is *Banquo;* and the young

Digitized by Google

lady with the liberal display of legs, who is kindly painting his face with a hare's foot, is dressed for *Fleance*. The large woman, who is consulting the stage directions in Cumberland's edition of *Macbeth*, is the *Lady Macbeth* of the night; she is always selected to play the part, because she is tall and stout, and *looks* a little like Mrs. Siddons—at a considerable distance. That stupid-looking milksop, with light hair and bow legs—a kind of man whom you can warrant town-made—is fresh caught; he plays *Malcolm* to-night, just to accustom himself to an audience. He will get on better by degrees; he will play *Othello* in a month, and in a month more, will very probably be apprehended on a charge of embezzlement. The black-eyed female with whom he is talking so earnestly, is dressed for the "gentlewoman." It is *her* first appearance, too—in that character. The boy of fourteen who is having his eyebrows smeared with soap and whitening, is *Duncan*, King of Scotland; and the two dirty men with the corked countenances, in very old green tunics, and dirty drab boots, are the "army."

"Look sharp below there, gents," exclaims the dresser, a red-headed and red-whiskered Jew, calling through the trap, "they're a-going to ring up. The flute says he'll be blowed if he plays any more, and they're getting precious noisy in front." A general rush immediately takes place to the half-dozen little steep steps leading to the stage, and the heterogeneous group are soon assembled at the side scenes, in breathless anxiety and motley confusion.

"Now," cries the manager, consulting the written list which hangs behind the first P. S. wing, "Scene 1, open country—lamps down—thunder and lightning—all ready, White?" [This is addressed to one of the army.] "All ready."—"Very well. Scene 2, front chamber. Is the front chamber down?"—"Yes."—"Very well."—"Jones" [to the other army who is up in the flies]. "Hallo!"—"Wind up the open country when we ring up."—"I'll take care."—

Digitized by Google

"Scene 3, back perspective with practical bridge. Bridge ready, White? Got the tressels there?"—"All right."

"Very well. Clear the stage," cries the manager, hastily packing every member of the company into the little space there is between the wings and the wall, and one wing and another. "Places, places. Now then, Witches—Duncan—Malcolm—bleeding officer—where's the bleeding officer?"—"Here!" replies the officer, who has been rose-pinking for the character. "Get ready, then; now, White, ring the second music-bell." The actors who are to be discovered are hastily arranged, and the actors who are not to be discovered place themselves, in their anxiety to peep at the house, just where the audience can see them. The bell rings, and the orchestra, in acknowledgment of the call, plays three distinct chords. The bell rings—the tragedy (!) opens—and our description closes.

From "Sketches by Boz."

Mrs. Joseph Porter

Most extensive were the preparations at Rose Villa, Clapham Rise, in the occupation of Mr. Gattleton (a stock-broker in especially comfortable circumstances), and great was the anxiety of Mr. Gattleton's interesting family, as the day fixed for the representation of the Private Play which had been "many months in preparation," approached. The whole family was infected with the mania for Private Theatricals; the house, usually so clean and tidy, was, to use Mr. Gattleton's expressive description, "regularly turned out o' windows;" the large dining-room, dismantled of its furniture and ornaments, presented a strange jumble of flats, flies, wings, lamps, bridges, clouds, thunder and lightning, festoons and flowers, daggers and foil, and various other messes in theatrical slang included under the comprehensive name of "properties." The bedrooms were

Digitized by Google

crowded with scenery, the kitchen was occupied by carpenters. Rehearsals took place every other night in the drawing-room, and every sofa in the house was more or less damaged by the perseverance and spirit with which Mr. Sempronius Gattleton, and Miss Lucina, rehearsed the smothering scene in "Othello"—it having been determined that that tragedy should form the first portion of the evening's entertainments.

"When we're a *leetle* more perfect, I think it will go admirably," said Mr. Sempronius, addressing his *corps dramatique*, at the conclusion of the hundred and fiftieth rehearsal. In consideration of his sustaining the trifling inconvenience of bearing all the expenses of the play, Mr. Sempronius had been, in the most handsome manner, unanimously elected stage-manager. "Evans," continued Mr. Gattleton the younger, addressing a tall, thin, pale young gentleman, with extensive whiskers—"Evans, you play *Roderigo* beautifully."

"Beautifully," echoed the three Miss Gattletons; for Mr. Evans was pronounced by all his lady friends to be "quite a dear." He looked so interesting, and had such lovely whiskers: to say nothing of his talent for writing verses in albums and playing the flute! *Roderigo* simpered and bowed.

"But I think," added the manager, "you are hardly perfect in the—fall—in the fencing-scene, where you are—you understand?"

"It's very difficult," said Mr. Evans, thoughtfully; "I've fallen about a good deal in our counting-house lately, for practice, only I find it hurts one so. Being obliged to fall backward you see, it bruises one's head a good deal."

"But you must take care you don't knock a wing down," said Mr. Gattleton, the elder, who had been appointed prompter, and who took as much interest in the play as the youngest of the company. "The stage is very narrow, you know."

Digitized by Google

"Oh! don't be afraid," said Mr. Evans, with a very self-satisfied air: "I shall fall with my head 'off,' and then I can't do any harm."

"But, egad," said the manager, rubbing his hands, "we shall make a decided hit in 'Masaniello.' Harleigh sings that music admirably."

Everybody echoed the sentiment. Mr. Harleigh smiled, and looked foolish—not an unusual thing with him—hummed "Behold how brightly breaks the morning," and blushed as red as the fisherman's nightcap he was trying on.

"Let's see," resumed the manager, telling the number on his fingers, "we shall have three dancing female peasants, besides *Fenella* and four fishermen. Then, there's our man Tom; he can have a pair of ducks of mine, and a check shirt of Bob's, and a red nightcap, and he'll do for another—that's five. In the choruses, of course, we can sing at the sides; and in the market-scene we can walk about in cloaks and things. When the revolt takes place, Tom must keep rushing in on one side and out on the other, with a pickaxe, as fast as he can. The effect will be electrical; it will look exactly as if there were an immense number of 'em. And in the eruption-scene we must burn the red fire, and upset the tea-trays, and make all sorts of noises—and it's sure to do."

"Sure! sure!" cried all the performers *unâ voce*—and away hurried Mr. Sempronius Gattleton to wash the burnt cork off his face, and superintend the "setting up" of some of the amateur-painted, but never-sufficiently-to-be-admired, scenery.

Mrs. Gattleton was a kind, good-tempered, vulgar soul, exceedingly fond of her husband and children, and entertaining only three dislikes. In the first place, she had a natural antipathy to anybody else's unmarried daughters; in the second, she was in bodily fear of anything in the shape of ridicule; lastly—almost a necessary consequence of this feeling—she regarded, with feelings of the utmost horror, one

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Joseph Porter, over the way. However, the good folks of Clapham and its vicinity stood very much in awe of scandal and sarcasm; and thus Mrs. Joseph Porter was courted, and flattered, and caressed, and invited, for much the same reason that induces a poor author, without a farthing in his pocket, to behave with extraordinary civility to a twopenny postman.

"Never mind, ma," said Miss Emma Porter, in colloquy with her respected relative, and trying to look unconcerned, "if they had invited me, you know that neither you nor pa would have allowed me to take part in such an exhibition."

"Just what I should have thought from your high sense of propriety," returned the mother. "I am glad to see, Emma, you know how to designate the proceeding." Miss P., by-the-bye, had only the week before made "an exhibition" of herself for four days, behind a counter at a fancy fair, to all and every of her Majesty's liege subjects who were disposed to pay a shilling each for the privilege of seeing some four dozen girls flirting with strangers, and playing at shop.

"There!" said Mrs. Porter, looking out of window; "there are two rounds of beef and a ham going in—clearly for sandwiches; and Thomas, the pastry-cook, says, there have been twelve dozen tarts ordered, besides blanc-mange and jellies. Upon my word! think of the Gattletons in fancy dresses, too!"

"Oh, it's too ridiculous!" said Miss Porter, hysterically.

"I'll manage to put them a little out of conceit with the business, however," said Mrs. Porter, and out she went on her charitable errand.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Gattleton," said Mrs. Joseph Porter, after they had been closeted for some time, and when, by dint of indefatigable pumping, she had managed to extract all the news about the play, "well, my dear, people may say what they please; indeed we know they will, for

Digitized by Google

some folks are *so* ill-natured. Ah, my dear Miss Lucina, how d'ye do? I was just telling your mamma that I have heard it said that——"

"What?"

"Mrs. Porter is alluding to the play, my dear," said Mrs. Gattleton; "she was, I am sorry to say, just informing me that——"

"Oh, now pray don't mention it," interrupted Mrs. Porter; "it's most absurd—quite as absurd as young What's-his-name saying he wondered how Miss Carolina, with such a foot and ankle, could have the vanity to play *Fenella*."

"Highly impertinent, whoever said it," said Mrs. Gattleton, bridling up.

"Certainly, my dear," chimed in the delighted Mrs. Porter; "most undoubtedly! Because, as I said, if Miss Carolina *does* play *Fenella*, it doesn't follow, as a matter of course, that she should think she has a pretty foot;—and then—such puppies as these young men are—he had the impudence to say, that——"

How far the amiable Mrs. Porter might have succeeded in her pleasant purpose, it is impossible to say, had not the entrance of Mr. Thomas Balderstone, Mrs. Gattleton's brother, familiarly called in the family "Uncle Tom," changed the course of conversation, and suggested to her mind an excellent plan of operation on the evening of the play.

Uncle Tom was very rich, and exceedingly fond of his nephews and nieces: as a matter of course, therefore, he was an object of great importance in his own family. He was one of the best-hearted men in existence: always in a good temper, and always talking. It was his boast that he wore top-boots on all occasions, and had never worn a black silk neckerchief; and it was his pride that he remembered all the principal plays of Shakespeare from beginning to end—and so he did. The result of this parrot-like accomplishment

Digitized by Google

was, that he was not only perpetually quoting himself, but that he could never sit by, and hear a misquotation from the "Swan of Avon" without setting the unfortunate delinquent right. He was also something of a wag; never missed an opportunity of saying what he considered a good thing, and invariably laughed until he cried at anything that appeared to him mirth moving or ridiculous.

"Well, girls!" said Uncle Tom, after the preparatory ceremony of kissing and how-d'ye-do-ing had been gone through —"how d'ye get on? Know your parts, eh?—Lucina, my dear, act ii., scene 1—place, left—cue—'Unknown fate,'— What's next, eh?—Go on—'The Heavens——'"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Lucina, "I recollect——

> The heavens forbid
> But that our loves and comforts should increase
> Even as our days do grow!

"Make a pause here and there," said the old gentleman, who was a great critic. "'But that our loves and comforts should increase'—emphasis on the last syllable, 'crease,'— loud again, 'as our days do grow;' emphasis on *days*. That's the way, my dear; trust to your uncle for emphasis. Ah! Sem, my boy, how are you?"

"Very well, thankee, uncle," returned Mr. Sempronius, who had just appeared looking something like a ringdove with a small circle round each eye: the result of his constant corking, "Of course we see you on Thursday."

"Of course, of course, my dear boy."

"What a pity it is your nephew didn't think of making you prompter, Mr. Balderstone!" whispered Mrs. Joseph Porter, "you would have been invaluable."

"Well, I flatter myself, I *should* have been tolerably up to the thing," responded Uncle Tom.

"I must bespeak sitting next you on the night," resumed Mrs. Porter; "and then, if our dear young friends here

Digitized by Google

should be at all wrong, you will be able to enlighten me. I shall be so interested."

"I am sure I shall be most happy to give you any assistance in my power."

"Mind, it's a bargain."

"Certainly."

"I don't know how it is," said Mrs. Gattleton to her daughters, as they were sitting round the fire in the evening, looking over their parts, "but I really very much wish Mrs. Joseph Porter wasn't coming on Thursday. I am sure she's scheming something."

"She can't make *us* ridiculous, however," observed Mr. Sempronius Gattleton, haughtily.

The long-looked-for Thursday arrived in due course, and brought with it, as Mr. Gattleton, senior, philosophically observed, "no disappointments, to speak of." True, it was yet a matter of doubt whether *Cassio* would be enabled to get into the dress which had been sent for him from the masquerade warehouse. It was equally uncertain whether the principal female singer would be sufficiently recovered from the influenza to make her appearance; Mr. Harleigh, the *Masaniello* of the night, was hoarse, and rather unwell, in consequence of the great quantity of lemon and sugar-candy he had eaten to improve his voice; and two flutes and a violoncello had pleaded severe colds. What of that? the audience were all coming. Everybody knew his part; the dresses were covered with tinsel and spangles; the white plumes looked beautiful; Mr. Evans had practised falling until he was bruised from head to foot and quite perfect; *Iago* was sure that, in the stabbing-scene, he should make "a decided hit." A self-taught deaf gentleman, who had kindly offered to bring his flute, would be a most valuable addition to the orchestra; Miss Jenkins's talent for the piano was too well known to be doubted for an instant; Mr. Cape had practised the violin accompaniment with her frequently; and

Digitized by Google

Mr. Brown, who had kindly undertaken, at a few hours' notice, to bring his violoncello, would, no doubt, manage extremely well.

Seven o'clock came, and so did the audience; all the rank and fashion of Clapham and its vicinity was fast filling the theatre. There were the Smiths, the Gubbinses, the Nixons, the Dixons, the Hicksons, people with all sorts of names, two aldermen, a sheriff in perspective, Sir Thomas Glumper (who had been knighted in the last reign for carrying up an address on somebody's escaping from nothing); and last, not least, there were Mrs. Joseph Porter and Uncle Tom, seated in the centre of the third row from the stage; Mrs. P. amusing Uncle Tom with all sorts of stories, and Uncle Tom amusing every one else by laughing most immoderately.

Ting, ting, ting! went the prompter's bell at eight oclock precisely, and dash went the orchestra into the overture to "The Men of Prometheus." The pianoforte player hammered away with laudable perseverance; and the violoncello, which struck in at intervals, "sounded very well, considering." The unfortunate individual, however, who had undertaken to play the flute accompaniment "at sight," found, from fatal experience, the perfect truth of the old adage, "out of sight, out of mind;" for being very near-sighted, and being placed at a considerable distance from his music-book, all he had an opportunity of doing was to play a bar now and then in the wrong place, and put the other performers out. It is, however, but justice to Mr. Brown to say that he did this to admiration. The overture, in fact, was not unlike a race between the different instruments; the piano came in first by several bars, and the violoncello next, quite distancing the poor flute; for the deaf gentleman *too-too'd* away, quite unconscious that he was at all wrong, until apprised, by the applause of the audience, that the overture was concluded. A considerable bustle and shuffling of feet

Digitized by Google

was then heard upon the stage, accompanied by whispers of "Here's a pretty go!—what's to be done?" &c. The audience applauded again, by way of raising the spirits of the performers; and then Mr. Sempronius desired the prompter, in a very audible voice, to "clear the stage, and ring up."

Ting, ting, ting! went the bell again. Everybody sat down; the curtain shook; rose sufficiently high to display several pair of yellow boots paddling about; and there remained.

Ting, ting, ting! went the bell again. The curtain was violently convulsed, but rose no higher; the audience tittered; Mrs. Porter looked at Uncle Tom; Uncle Tom looked at everybody, rubbing his hands, and laughing with perfect rapture. After as much ringing with the little bell as a muffing boy would make in going down a tolerably long street, and a vast deal of whispering, hammering, and calling for nails and cord, the curtain at length rose, and discovered Mr. Sempronius Gattleton *solus*, and decked for *Othello*. After three distinct rounds of applause, during which Mr. Sempronius applied his right hand to his left breast, and bowed in the most approved manner, the manager advanced and said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen—I assure you it is with sincere regret, that I regret to be compelled to inform you, that *Iago* who was to have played Mr. Wilson—I beg your pardon, Ladies and Gentlemen, but I am naturally somewhat agitated (applause)—I mean, Mr. Wilson, who was to have played *Iago*, is—that is, has been—or, in other words, Ladies and Gentlemen, the fact is, that I have just received a note, in which I am informed that *Iago* is unavoidably detained at the Post Office this evening. Under these circumstances, I trust—a—a—amateur performance—a—another gentleman undertaken to read the part—request indulgence for a short time—courtesy and kindness of a

Digitized by Google

British audience." Overwhelming applause. Exit Mr. Sempronius Gattleton, and curtain falls.

The audience were, of course, exceedingly good-humoured; the whole business was a joke; and accordingly they waited for an hour with the utmost patience, being enlivened by an interlude of rout-cakes and lemonade. It appeared by Mr. Sempronius's subsequent explanation, that the delay would not have been so great, had it not so happened that when the substitute *Iago* had finished dressing, and just as the play was on the point of commencing, the original *Iago* unexpectedly arrived. The former was therefore compelled to undress, and the latter to dress for his part; which, as he found some difficulty in getting into his clothes, occupied no inconsiderable time. At last, the tragedy began in real earnest. It went off well enough, until the third scene of the first act, in which *Othello* addresses the Senate: the only remarkable circumstance being, that as *Iago* could not get on any of the stage boots, in consequence of his feet being violently swelled with the heat and excitement, he was under the necessity of playing the part in a pair of Wellingtons, which contrasted rather oddly with his richly embroidered pantaloons. When *Othello* started with his address to the Senate (whose dignity was represented by the *Duke*, a carpenter, two men engaged on the recommendation of the gardener, and a boy), Mrs. Porter found the opportunity she so anxiously sought.

Mr. Sempronius proceeded:

> "'Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors,
> My very noble and approv'd good masters,
> That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter
> It is most true;—rude am I in my speech——'"

"Is that right?" whispered Mrs. Porter to Uncle Tom.

"No."

"Tell him so, then."

Digitized by Google

"I will. Sem!" called out Uncle Tom, "that's wrong, my boy."

"What's wrong, uncle?" demanded *Othello*, quite forgetting the dignity of his situation.

"You've left out something. 'True I have married——'"

"Ah, ah!" said Mr. Sempronius, endeavouring to hide his confusion as much and as ineffectually as the audience attempted to conceal their half-suppressed tittering, by coughing with extraordinary violence——

> ——"'true I have married her;—
> The very head and front of my offending
> Hath this extent; no more.'"

(*Aside*) Why don't you prompt, father?"

"Because I've mislaid my spectacles," said poor Mr. Gattleton, almost dead with the heat and bustle.

"There, now it's 'rude am I,'" said Uncle Tom.

"Yes, I know it is," returned the unfortunate manager, proceeding with his part.

It would be useless and tiresome to quote the number of instances in which Uncle Tom, now completely in his element, and instigated by the mischievous Mrs. Porter, corrected the mistakes of the performers; suffice it to say that, having mounted his hobby, nothing could induce him to dismount; so, during the whole remainder of the play, he performed a kind of running accompaniment, by muttering everybody's part as it was being delivered, in an under-tone. The audience were highly amused, Mrs. Porter delighted, the performers embarrassed; Uncle Tom never was better pleased in all his life; and Uncle Tom's nephews and nieces had never, although the declared heirs to his large property, so heartily wished him gathered to his fathers as on that memorable occasion.

From "Sketches by Boz."

Digitized by Google

David Copperfield Goes to the Play

1. *At Covent Garden*

Being then in a pleasant frame of mind (from which I infer that poisoning is not always disagreeable in some stages of the process), I resolved to go to the play. It was Covent Garden Theatre that I chose; and there, from the back of a centre box, I saw Julius Cæsar and the new Pantomine. To have all those noble Romans alive before me, and walking in and out for my entertainment, instead of being the stern taskmasters they had been at school, was a most novel and delightful effect. But the mingled reality and mystery of the whole show, the influence upon me of the poetry, the lights, the music, the company, the smooth stupendous changes of glittering and brilliant scenery, was so dazzling, and opened up such illimitable regions of delight that when I came out into the rainy street, at twelve o'clock at night, I felt as if I had come from the clouds, where I had been leading a romantic life for ages, to a bawling, splashing, link-lighted, umbrella-struggling, hackney-coach-jostling, patten-clinking, muddy, miserable world.

2. *Another Night*

Somebody said to me, "Let us go to the theatre, Copperfield!" There was no bedroom before me, but again the jingling table covered with glasses; the lamp; Grainger on my right hand, Markham on my left, and Steerforth opposite—all sitting in a mist, and a long way off. The theatre? To be sure. The very thing. Come along! But they must excuse me if I saw everybody out first, and turned the lamp off—in case of fire.

Owing to some confusion in the dark, the door was gone. I was feeling for it in the window-curtains, when Steerforth, laughing, took me by the arm and led me out. We went

Digitized by Google

down-stairs, one behind another. Near the bottom, somebody fell, and rolled down. Somebody else said it was Copperfield. I was angry at that false report, until, finding myself on my back in the passage, I began to think there might be some foundation for it.

A very foggy night, with great rings round the lamps in the streets! There was an indistinct talk of its being wet. I considered it frosty. Steerforth dusted me under a lamp-post, and put my hat into shape, which somebody produced from somewhere in a most extraordinary manner, for I hadn't had it on before. Steerforth then said, "You are all right, Copperfield, are you not?" and I told him, "Neverberrer."

A man, sitting in a pigeon-hole place, looked out of the fog, and took money from somebody, inquiring if I was one of the gentlemen paid for, and appearing rather doubtful (as I remember in the glimpse I had of him) whether to take the money for me or not. Shortly afterwards, we were very high up in a very hot theatre, looking down into a large pit, that seemed to me to smoke; the people with whom it was crammed were so indistinct. There was a great stage, too, looking very clean and smooth after the streets; and there were people upon it, talking about something or other, but not at all intelligibly. There was an abundance of bright lights, and there was music, and there were ladies down in the boxes, and I don't know what more. The whole building looked to me, as if it were learning to swim; it conducted itself in such an unaccountable manner, when I tried to steady it.

On somebody's motion, we resolved to go down-stairs to the dress-boxes, where the ladies were. A gentleman lounging, full dressed, on a sofa, with an opera-glass in his hand, passes before my view, and also my own figure at full length in a glass. Then I was being ushered into one of these boxes, and found myself saying something as I sat down, and people

Digitized by Google

about me crying "Silence" to somebody, and ladies casting indignant glances at me, and—what! yes!—Agnes, sitting on the seat before me, in the same box, with a lady and gentleman beside her, whom I didn't know. I see her face now, better than I did then, I dare say, with its indelible look of regret and wonder turned upon me.

"Agnes!" I said, thickly, "Lorblessmer! Agnes!"

"Hush! Pray!" she answered, I could not conceive why. "You disturb the company. Look at the stage!"

I tried, on her injunction, to fix it, and to hear something of what was going on there, but quite in vain. I looked at her again by-and-by, and saw her shrink into her corner, and put her gloved hand to her forehead.

"Agnes!" I said. "I'm afraid you'renorwell."

"Yes, yes. Do not mind me, Trotwood," she returned. "Listen! Are you going away soon?"

"Amigoarawaysoo?" I repeated.

"Yes."

I had a stupid intention of replying that I was going to wait, to hand her down-stairs. I suppose I expressed it, somehow; for, after she had looked at me attentively for a little while, she appeared to understand, and replied in a low tone:

"I know you will do as I ask you, if I tell you I am very earnest in it. Go away now, Trotwood, for my sake, and ask your friends to take you home."

She had so far improved me, for the time, that though I was angry with her, I felt ashamed, and with a short "Goori!" (which I intended for "Good night") got up and went away. They followed, and I stepped at once out of the box-door into my bedroom, where Steerforth was with me, helping me to undress, and where I was by turns telling him that Agnes was my sister, and adjuring him to bring the corkscrew, that I might open another bottle of wine.

From "David Copperfield."

Digitized by Google

Frederick Dorrit in the Orchestra Pit

The old man looked as if the remote high gallery windows, with their little strip of sky, might have been the point of his better fortunes, from which he had descended until he had gradually sunk down below there to the bottom. He had been in that place six nights a week for many years, but had never been observed to raise his eyes above his music-book, and was confidently believed to have never seen a play. There were legends in the place that he had not so much as known the popular heroes and heroines by sight, and that the low comedian had "mugged" at him in his richest manner fifty nights for a wager, and he had shown no trace of consciousness. The carpenters had a joke that he was dead without being aware of it, and the frequenters of the pit supposed him to pass his whole life, night and day, and Sunday and all, in the orchestra. They had tried him a few times with pinches of snuff offered over the rails, and he had always responded to this attention with a momentary waking-up of manner that had the pale phantom of a gentleman in it; beyond this he never, on any occasion, had any other part in what was going on than the part written out for the clarionet: in private life, where there was no part for the clarionet, he had no part at all.

From "Little Dorrit."

The Waldengarver

This is the tale told by Pip who had known the Waldengarver when, under the humbler name of Wopsle, he was clerk of the church back home. Pip had attended for a time a village school somewhat vaguely conducted by Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt. The Mr. Wopsle

Digitized by Google

of those days, had, in addition to a Roman nose and a large, shining, bald forehead, "a deep voice which he was uncommonly proud of; indeed it was understood among his acquaintance that if you could only give him his head, he would read the clergyman into fits; he himself confessed that if the Church was 'thrown open,' meaning to competition, he would not despair of making his mark in it. The church not being 'thrown open,' he was, as I have said, our clerk. But he punished the Amens tremendously; and when he gave out the Psalm—always giving the whole verse—he looked all around the church first, as much as to say: 'You have heard our friend overhead; oblige me with your opinion of this style.'" Now, lifted by his great expectations, Pip is in London learning to be a gentleman, and on him, much embarrassed, calls his dear Joe Gargery, the blacksmith—awkward, patient, gentle Joe, who, inexplicably, has come up to London in company with Mr. Wopsle.

1—The Most Melancholy Dane of All

This avenging phantom was ordered to be on duty at eight on Tuesday morning in the hall (it was two feet square, as charged for floorcloth), and Herbert suggested certain things for breakfast that he thought Joe would like. While I felt sincerely obliged to him for being so interested and considerate, I had an odd half-provoked sense of suspicion upon me, that if Joe had been coming to see *him*, he wouldn't have been quite so brisk about it.

However, I came into town on the Monday night to be

Digitized by Google

ready for Joe, and I got up early in the morning, and caused the sitting-room and breakfast-table to assume their most splendid appearance. Unfortunately the morning was drizzly, and an angel could not have concealed the fact that Barnard was shedding sooty tears outside the window, like some weak giant of a Sweep.

As the time approached I should have liked to run away, but the Avenger pursuant to orders was in the hall, and presently I heard Joe, on the staircase. I knew it was Joe, by his clumsy manner of coming up-stairs—his state boots being always too big for him—and by the time it took him to read the names on the other floors in the course of his ascent. When at last he stopped outside our door, I could hear his finger tracing over the painted letters of my name, and I afterwards distinctly heard his breathing in at the keyhole. Finally he gave a faint single rap, and Pepper—such was the compromising name of the avenging boy—announced "Mr. Gargery!" I thought he never would have done wiping his feet, and that I must have gone out to lift him off the mat, but at last he came in.

"Joe, how are you, Joe?"

"Pip, how AIR you, Pip?"

With his good honest face all glowing and shining, and his hat put down on the floor between us, he caught both my hands and worked them straight up and down, as if I had been the last-patented Pump.

"I am glad to see you, Joe. Give me your hat."

But Joe, taking it up carefully with both hands, like a bird's-nest with eggs in it, wouldn't hear of parting with that piece of property, and persisted in standing talking over it in a most uncomfortable way.

"Which you have that growed," said Joe, "and that swelled, and that gentle-folked"; Joe considered a little before he discovered this word; "as, to be sure, you are a honour to your king and country."

Digitized by Google

"And you, Joe, look wonderfully well."

"Thank God," said Joe, "I'm ekerval to most. And your sister, she's no worse than she were. And Biddy, she's ever right and ready. And all friends is no backerder, if not no forarder. 'Ceptin' Wopsle: he's had a drop."

All this time (still with both hands taking great care of the bird's-nest), Joe was rolling his eyes round and round the room, and round and round the flowered pattern of my dressing-gown.

"Had a drop, Joe?"

"Why, yes," said Joe, lowering his voice, "he's left the Church and went into the playacting. Which the playacting have likewise brought him to London along with me. And his wish were," said Joe, getting the bird's-nest under his left arm for the moment, and groping in it for an egg with his right; "if no offence, as I would 'and you that."

I took what Joe gave me, and found it to be the crumpled playbill of a small metropolitan theatre, announcing the first appearance, in that very week, of "the celebrated Provincial Amateur of Roscian renown, whose unique performance in the highest tragic walk of our National Bard has lately occasioned so great a sensation in local dramatic circles."

"Were you at this performance, Joe?" I inquired.

"I *were*," said Joe, with emphasis and solemnity.

"Was there a great sensation?"

"Why," said Joe, "yes, there certainly were a peck of orange-peel. Partickler when he see the ghost. Though I put it to yourself, sir, whether it were calc'lated to keep a man up to his work with a good hart, to be continiwally cutting in betwixt him and the Ghost with 'Amen!' A man may have had a misfortun' and been in the Church," said Joe, lowering his voice to an argumentative and feeling tone, "but that is no reason why you should put him out at such a time. Which I meantersay, if the ghost of a man's

Digitized by Google

own father cannot be allowed to claim his attention, what can, Sir? Still more, when his mourning 'at is unfortunately made so small as that the weight of the black feathers brings it off, try to keep it on how you may."

. . . . . .

As we contemplated the fire, and as I thought what a difficult vision to realise this same Capital sometimes was, I put my hands in my pockets. A folded piece of paper in one of them attracted my attention. I opened it and found it to be the playbill I had received from Joe, relative to the celebrated provincial amateur of Roscian renown. "And bless my heart," I involuntarily added aloud, "it's to-night!"

This changed the subject in an instant, and made us hurriedly resolve to go to the play. So, when I had pledged myself to comfort and abet Herbert in the affair of his heart by all practicable and impracticable means, and when Herbert had told me that his affianced already knew me by reputation, and that I should be presented to her, and when we had warmly shaken hands upon our mutual confidence, we blew out our candles, made up our fire, locked our door, and issued forth in quest of Mr. Wopsle and Denmark.

On our arrival in Denmark, we found the king and queen of that country elevated in two arm-chairs on a kitchen-table, holding a Court. The whole of the Danish nobility were in attendance; consisting of a noble boy in the wash-leather boots of a gigantic ancestor, a venerable Peer with a dirty face, who seemed to have risen from the people late in life, and the Danish chivalry with a comb in its hair and a pair of white silk legs, and presenting on the whole a feminine appearance. My gifted townsman stood gloomily apart, with folded arms, and I could have wished that his curls and forehead had been more probable.

Several curious little circumstances transpired as the action proceeded. The late king of the country not only

Digitized by Google

appeared to have been troubled with a cough at the time of his decease, but to have taken it with him to the tomb, and to have brought it back. The royal phantom also carried a ghostly manuscript round its truncheon, to which it had the appearance of occasionally referring, and that, too, with an air of anxiety and a tendency to lose the place of reference which were suggestive of a state of mortality. It was this, I conceive, which led to the Shade's being advised by the gallery to "turn over!"—a recommendation which it took extremely ill. It was likewise to be noted of this majestic spirit that whereas it always appeared with an air of having been out a long time and walked an immense distance, it perceptibly came from a closely contiguous wall. This occasioned its terrors to be received derisively. The Queen of Denmark, a very buxom lady, though no doubt historically brazen, was considered by the public to have too much brass about her; her chin being attached to her diadem by a broad band of that metal (as if she had a gorgeous toothache), her waist being encircled by another, and each of her arms by another, so that she was openly mentioned as "the kettledrum." The noble boy in the ancestral boots, was inconsistent; representing himself, as it were in one breath, as an able seaman, a strolling actor, a gravedigger, a clergyman, and a person of the utmost importance at a Court fencing-match, on the authority of whose practised eye and nice discrimination the finest strokes were judged. This gradually led to a want of toleration for him, and even—on his being detected in holy orders, and declining to perform the funeral service—to the general indignation taking the form of nuts. Lastly, Ophelia was a prey to such slow musical madness, that when, in course of time, she had taken off her white muslin scarf, folded it up, and buried it, a sulky man who had been long cooling his impatient nose against an iron bar in the front row of the gallery, growled, "Now the baby's put to bed,

Digitized by Google

let's have supper!" Which, to say the least of it, was out of keeping.

Upon my unfortunate townsman all these incidents accumulated with playful effect. Whenever that undecided Prince had to ask a question or state a doubt, the public helped him out with it. As for example; on the question whether 'twas nobler in the mind to suffer, some roared yes, and some no, and some inclining to both opinions said "toss up for it;" and quite a Debating Society arose. When he asked what should such fellows as he do crawling between earth and heaven, he was encouraged with loud cries of "Hear, hear!" When he appeared with his stocking disordered (its disorder expressed, according to usage, by one very neat fold in the top, which I suppose to be always got up with a flat iron), a conversation took place in the gallery respecting the paleness of his leg, and whether it was occasioned by the turn the ghost had given him. On his taking the recorders—very like a little black flute that had just been played in the orchestra and handed out at the door—he was called upon unanimously for Rule Britannia. When he recommended the player not to saw the air thus, the sulky man said, "And don't *you* do it, neither; you're a deal worse than *him!*" And I grieve to add that peals of laughter greeted Mr. Wopsle on every one of these occasions.

But his greatest trials were in the churchyard: which had the appearance of a primeval forest, with a kind of small ecclesiastical wash-house on one side, and a turnpike gate on the other. Mr. Wopsle, in a comprehensive black cloak, being descried entering at the turnpike, the gravedigger was admonished in a friendly way, "Look out! Here's the undertaker a coming, to see how you're getting on with your work!" I believe it is well known in a constitutional country that Mr. Wopsle could not possibly have returned the skull, after moralising over it, without dusting his fingers on a white napkin taken from his breast; but even that inno-

Digitized by Google

cent and indispensable action did not pass without the comment "Wai-ter!" The arrival of the body for interment (in an empty black box with the lid tumbling open), was the signal for a general joy which was much enhanced by the discovery, among the bearers, of an individual obnoxious to identification. The joy attended Mr. Wopsle through his struggle with Laertes on the brink of the orchestra and the grave, and slackened no more until he had tumbled the king off the kitchen-table, and had died by inches from the ankles upward.

We had made some pale efforts in the beginning to applaud Mr. Wopsle; but they were too hopeless to be persisted in. Therefore we had sat, feeling keenly for him, but laughing, nevertheless, from ear to ear. I laughed in spite of myself all the time, the whole thing was so droll; and yet I had a latent impression that there was something decidedly fine in Mr. Wopsle's elocution—not for old associations' sake, I am afraid, but because it was very slow, very dreary, very up-hill and down-hill, and very unlike any way in which any man in any natural circumstances of life or death ever expressed himself about anything. When the tragedy was over, and he had been called for and hooted, I said to Herbert, "Let us go at once, or perhaps we shall meet him."

We made all the haste we could down-stairs, but we were not quick enough either. Standing at the door was a Jewish man with an unnatural heavy smear of eyebrow, who caught my eyes as we advanced, and said, when we came up with him:

"Mr. Pip and friend?"

Identity of Mr. Pip and friend confessed.

"Mr. Waldengarver," said the man, "would be glad to have the honour."

"Waldengarver?" I repeated—when Herbert murmured in my ear, "Probably Wopsle."

"Oh!" said I. "Yes. Shall we follow you?"

Digitized by Google

"A few steps, please." When we were in a side alley, he turned and asked, "How do you think he looked?—*I* dressed him."

I don't know what he had looked like, except a funeral; with the addition of a large Danish sun or star hanging round his neck by a blue ribbon, that had given him the appearance of being insured in some extraordinary Fire Office. But I said he had looked very nice.

"When he come to the grave," said our conductor, "he showed his cloak beautiful. But, judging from the wing, it looked to me that when he see the ghost in the queen's apartment, he might have made more of his stockings."

I modestly assented, and we all fell through a little dirty swing door, into a sort of hot packing-case immediately behind it. Here Mr. Wopsle was divesting himself of his Danish garments, and here there was just room for us to look at him over one another's shoulders, by keeping the packing-case door, or lid, wide open.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Wopsle, "I am proud to see you. I hope, Mr. Pip, you will excuse my sending round. I had the happiness to know you in former times, and the Drama has ever had a claim which has ever been acknowledged, on the noble and the affluent."

Meanwhile, Mr. Waldengarver, in a frightful perspiration, was trying to get himself out of his princely sables.

"Skin the stockings off, Mr. Waldengarver," said the owner of that property, "or you'll bust 'em. Bust 'em, and you'll bust five-and-thirty shillings. Shakspeare never was complimented with a finer pair. Keep quiet in your chair now, and leave 'em to me."

With that, he went upon his knees, and began to flay his victim; who, on the first stocking coming off, would certainly have fallen over backward with his chair, but for there being no room to fall anyhow.

I had been afraid until then to say a word about the play.

Digitized by Google

But then, Mr. Waldengarver looked up at us complacently, and said:

"Gentlemen, how did it seem to you to go, in front?"

Herbert said from behind (at the same time poking me), "capitally." So I said "capitally."

"How did you like my reading of the character, gentlemen?" said Mr. Waldengarver, almost, if not quite, with patronage

Herbert said from behind (again poking me), "massive and concrete." So I said boldly, as if I had originated it, and must beg to insist upon it, "massive and concrete."

"I am glad to have your approbation, gentlemen," said Mr. Waldengarver, with an air of dignity, in spite of his being ground against the wall at the time, and holding on by the seat of the chair.

"But I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Waldengarver," said the man who was on his knees, "in which you're out in your reading. Now mind! I don't care who says contrary; I tell you so. You're out in your reading of Hamlet when you get your legs in profile. The last Hamlet as I dressed, made the same mistakes in his reading at rehearsal, till I got him to put a large red wafer on each of his shins, and then at that rehearsal (which was the last) I went in front, sir, to the back of the pit, and whenever his reading brought him into profile, I called out, 'I don't see no wafers!' And at night his reading was lovely."

Mr. Waldengarver smiled at me, as much as to say "a faithful dependent—I overlook his folly;" and then said aloud, "My view is a little too classic and thoughtful for them here; but they will improve, they will improve."

Herbert and I said together, Oh, no doubt they would improve.

"Did you observe, gentlemen," said Mr. Waldengarver, "that there was a man in the gallery who endeavoured to cast derision on the service—I mean, the representation?"

Digitized by Google

We basely replied that we rather thought we had noticed such a man. I added, "He was drunk, no doubt."

"Oh, dear no, sir," said Mr. Wopsle, "not drunk. His employer would see to that, sir. His employer would not allow him to be drunk."

"You know his employer?" said I.

Mr. Wopsle shut his eyes, and opened them again; performing both ceremonies very slowly. "You must have observed, gentlemen," said he, "an ignorant and blatant ass, with a rasping throat and a countenance expressive of low malignity, who went through—I will not say sustained—the rôle (if I may use a French expression) of Claudius King of Denmark. That is his employer, gentlemen. Such is the profession!"

Without distinctly knowing whether I should have been more sorry for Mr. Wopsle if he had been in despair, I was so sorry for him as it was, that I took the opportunity of his turning round to have his braces put on—which jostled us out at the doorway—to ask Herbert what he thought of having him home to supper? Herbert said he thought it would be kind to do so; therefore I invited him, and he went to Barnard's with us, wrapped up to the eyes, and we did our best for him, and he sat until two o'clock in the morning, reviewing his success and developing his plans. I forget in detail what they were, but I have a general recollection that he was to begin with reviving the Drama, and to end with crushing it; inasmuch as his decease would leave it utterly bereft and without a chance or hope.

2—*The Decline of the Drama*

I dined long afterwards at what Herbert and I used to call a Geographical chop-house—where there were maps of the world in porter-pot rims on every half-yard of the table-cloths, and charts of gravy on every one of the knives—to

Digitized by Google

this day there is scarcely a single chop-house within the Lord Mayor's dominions which is not Geographical—and wore out the time in dozing over crumbs, staring at gas, and baking in a hot blast of dinners. By-and-by, I roused myself and went to the play.

There, I found a virtuous boatswain in his Majesty's service—a most excellent man, though I could have wished his trousers not quite so tight in some places and not quite so loose in others—who knocked all the little men's hats over their eyes, though he was very generous and brave, and who wouldn't hear of anybody's paying taxes, though he was very patriotic. He had a bag of money in his pocket, like a pudding in the cloth, and on that property married a young person in bed-furniture, with great rejoicings; the whole population of Portsmouth (nine in number at the last Census) turning out on the beach to rub their own hands and shake everybody else's, and sing, "Fill, fill!" A certain dark-complexioned Swab, however, who wouldn't fill, or do anything else that was proposed to him, and whose heart was openly stated (by the boatswain) to be as black as his figure-head, proposed to two other Swabs to get all mankind into difficulties; which was so effectually done (the Swab family having considerable political influence) that it took half the evening to set things right, and then it was only brought about through an honest little grocer with a white hat, black gaiters, and red nose, getting into a clock, with a gridiron, and listening, and coming out, and knocking everybody down from behind with the gridiron whom he couldn't confute with what he had overheard. This led to Mr. Wopsle's (who had never been heard of before) coming in with a star and garter on, as a plenipotentiary of great power direct from the Admiralty, to say that the Swabs were all to go to prison on the spot, and that he had brought the boatswain down the Union Jack, as a slight acknowledgment of his public services. The boatswain, unmanned for

Digitized by Google

the first time, respectfully dried his eyes on the Jack, and then cheering up and addressing Mr. Wopsle as Your Honour, solicited permission to take him by the fin. Mr. Wopsle conceding his fin with a gracious dignity, was immediately shoved into a dusty corner while everybody danced a hornpipe; and from that corner, surveying the public with a discontented eye, became aware of me.

The second piece was the last new grand comic Christmas pantomime, in the first scene of which it pained me to suspect that I detected Mr. Wopsle, with red worsted legs under a highly magnified phosphoric countenance and a shock of red curtain-fringe for his hair, engaged in the manufacture of thunderbolts in a mine, and displaying great cowardice when his gigantic master came home (very hoarse) to dinner. But he presently presented himself under worthier circumstances; for, the Genius of Youthful Love being in want of assistance—on account of the parental brutality of an ignorant farmer who opposed the choice of his daughter's heart, by purposely falling upon the object in a flour sack out of the first-floor window—summoned a sententious Enchanter; and he, coming up from the antipodes rather unsteadily, after an apparently violent journey, proved to be Mr. Wopsle in a high-crowned hat, with a necromantic work in one volume under his arm. The business of this enchanter on earth, being principally to be butted at, danced at, and flashed at with fires of various colours, he had a good deal of time on his hands.

From "Great Expectations."

Dullborough Town

It lately happened that I found myself rambling about the scenes among which my earliest days were passed; scenes from which I departed when I was a child, and which I did not revisit until I was a man. This is no uncommon

Digitized by Google

chance, but one that befalls some of us any day; perhaps it may not be quite uninteresting to compare notes with the reader respecting an experience so familiar and a journey so uncommercial.

I call my boyhood's home (and I feel like a Tenor in an English Opera when I mention it) Dullborough. Most of us come from Dullborough who come from a country town.

The Theatre was in existence, I found, on asking the fishmonger, who had a compact show of stock in his window, consisting of a sole and a quart of shrimps—and I resolved to comfort my mind by going to look at it. Richard the Third, in a very uncomfortable cloak, had first appeared to me there, and had made my heart leap with terror by backing up against the stage-box in which I was posted, while struggling for life against the virtuous Richmond. It was within those walls that I had learnt as from a page of English history, how that wicked King slept in war-time on a sofa much too short for him, and how fearfully his conscience troubled his boots. There, too, had I first seen the funny countryman, but countryman of noble principles, in a flowered waistcoat, crunch up his little hat and throw it on the ground, and pull off his coat, saying, "Dom thee, squire, coom on with thy fistes then!" At which the lovely young woman who kept company with him (and who went out gleaning, in a narrow white muslin apron with five beautiful bars of five different-coloured ribbons across it) was so frightened for his sake, that she fainted away. Many wondrous secrets of Nature had I come to the knowledge of in that sanctuary: of which not the least terrific were, that the witches in Macbeth bore an awful resemblance to the Thanes and other proper inhabitants of Scotland; and that the good King Duncan couldn't rest in his grave, but was constantly coming out of it and calling himself somebody else. To the Theatre, therefore, I repaired for consolation. But I found very little, for it was in a bad and declining way. A dealer

Digitized by Google

in wine and bottled beer had already squeezed his trade into the box-office, and the theatrical money was taken—when it came—in a kind of meat-safe in the passage. The dealer in wine and bottled beer must have insinuated himself under the stage too; for he announced that he had various descriptions of alcoholic drinks "in the wood," and there was no possible stowage for the wood anywhere else. Evidently, he was by degrees eating the establishment away to the core, and would soon have sole possession of it. It was To Let, and hopelessly so, for its old purposes; and there had been no entertainment within its walls for a long time except a Panorama; and even that had been announced as "pleasingly instructive," and I know too well the fatal meaning and the leaden import of those terrible expressions. No, there was no comfort in the Theatre. It was mysteriously gone, like my own youth. Unlike my own youth, it might be coming back some day; but there was little promise of it.

From "The Uncommercial Traveller."

In the French-Flemish Country

"It is neither a bold nor a diversified country," said I to myself, "this country which is three-quarters Flemish, and a quarter French; yet it has its attractions too. Though great lines of railway traverse it, the trains leave it behind, and go puffing off to Paris and the South, to Belgium and Germany, to the Northern Sea-Coast of France, and to England, and merely smoke it a little in passing. Then I don't know it, and that is a good reason for being here; and I can't pronounce half the long queer names I see inscribed over the shops, and that is another good reason for being here, since I surely ought to learn how." In short, I was "here," and I wanted an excuse for not going away from here, and I made it to my satisfaction, and stayed here.

What part in my decision was borne by Monsieur P.

Digitized by Google

Salcy, is of no moment, though I own to encountering that gentleman's name on a red bill on the wall, before I made up my mind. Monsieur P. Salcy, "par permission de M. le Maire," had established his theatre in the whitewashed Hôtel de Ville, on the steps of which illustrious edifice I stood. And Monsieur P. Salcy, privileged director of such theatre, situate in "the first theatrical arrondissement of the department of the North," invited French-Flemish mankind to come and partake of the intellectual banquet provided by his family of dramatic artists, fifteen subjects in number. "La Famille P. SALCY, composée d'artistes dramatiques, au nombre de 15 sujets."

There was a Fair besides. The double persuasion being irresistible, and my sponge being left behind at the last Hotel, I made the tour of the little town to buy another. In the small sunny shops—mercers, opticians, and druggist-grocers, with here and there an emporium of religious images—the gravest of old spectacled Flemish husbands and wives sat contemplating one another across bare counters, while the wasps, who seemed to have taken military possession of the town, and to have placed it under wasp-martial law, executed warlike manœuvres in the windows. Other shops the wasps had entirely to themselves, and nobody cared and nobody came when I beat with a five-franc piece upon the board of custom. What I sought was no more to be found than if I had sought a nugget of Californian gold: so I went, spongeless, to pass the evening with the Family P. Salcy.

The members of the Family P. Salcy were so fat and so like one another—fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, uncles, and aunts—that I think the local audience were much confused about the plot of the piece under representation, and to the last expected that everybody must turn out to be the long-lost relative of everybody else. The Theatre was established on the top story of the Hôtel de Ville, and was approached by a long bare staircase, whereon, in an airy

Digitized by Google

situation, one of the P. Salcy Family—a stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt—took the money. This occasioned the greatest excitement of the evening; for, no sooner did the curtain rise on the introductory Vaudeville, and reveal in the person of the young lover (singing a very short song with his eyebrows) apparently the very same identical stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt, than everybody rushed out to the paying-place, to ascertain whether he could possibly have put on that dress-coat, that clear complexion, and those arched black vocal eyebrows, in so short a space of time. It then became manifest that this was another stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt: to whom, before the spectators had recovered their presence of mind, entered a third stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt, exactly like him. These two "subjects," making with the money-taker three of the announced fifteen, fell into conversation touching a charming young widow; who, presently appearing, proved to be a stout lady altogether irrepressible by any means—quite a parallel case to the American Negro—fourth of the fifteen subjects, and sister of the fifth who presided over the check-department. In good time the whole of the fifteen subjects were dramatically presented, and we had the inevitable Ma Mère, Ma Mère! and also the inevitable malédiction d'un père, and likewise the inevitable Marquis, and also the inevitable provincial young man, weak-minded but faithful, who followed Julie to Paris, and cried and laughed and choked all at once. The story was wrought out with the help of a virtuous spinning-wheel in the beginning, a vicious set of diamonds in the middle, and a rheumatic blessing (which arrived by post) from Ma Mère towards the end; the whole resulting in a small sword in the body of one of the stout gentlemen imperfectly repressed by a belt, fifty thousand francs per annum and a decoration to the other stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt, and an assurance

Digitized by Google

from everybody to the provincial young man that if he were not supremely happy—which he seemed to have no reason whatever for being—he ought to be. This afforded him a final opportunity of crying and laughing and choking all at once, and sent the audience home sentimentally delighted. Audience more attentive and better behaved there could not possibly be, though the places of second rank in the Theatre of the Family P. Salcy were sixpence each in English money, and the places of first rank a shilling. How the fifteen subjects ever got so fat upon it, the kind Heavens know.

From "The Uncommercial Traveller."

In an Empty Theatre

Between the bridge and the two great theatres, there was but the distance of a few hundred paces, so the theatres came next. Grim and black within, at night, those great dry Wells, and lonesome to imagine, with the rows of faces faded out, the lights extinguished, and the seats all empty. One would think that nothing in them knew itself at such a time but Yorick's skull. In one of my night walks, as the church steeples were shaking the March winds and rain with strokes of Four, I passed the outer boundary of one of these great deserts, and entered it. With a dim lantern in my hand, I groped my well-known way to the stage and looked over the orchestra—which was like a great grave dug for a time of pestilence—into the void beyond. A dismal cavern of an immense aspect, with the chandelier gone dead like everything else, and nothing visible through mist and fog and space, but tiers of winding-sheets. The ground at my feet where, when last there, I had seen the peasantry of Naples dancing among the vines, reckless of the burning mountain which threatened to overwhelm them, was now in possession of a strong serpent of engine-hose, watchfully lying in wait for the serpent Fire, and ready to fly at it if it showed its

Digitized by Google

forked tongue. A ghost of a watchman, carrying a faint corpse candle, haunted the distant upper gallery and flitted away. Retiring within the proscenium, and holding my light above my head towards the rolled-up curtain—green no more, but black as ebony—my sight lost itself in a gloomy vault, showing faint indications in it of a shipwreck of canvas and cordage. Methought I felt much as a diver might, at the bottom of the sea.

From "The Uncommercial Traveller."

Digitized by Google

The Vincent Crummles Company

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE VINCENT CRUMMLES COMPANY

1.—THE COMPANY OF MR. VINCENT CRUMMLES, AND HIS AFFAIRS DOMESTIC AND PERSONAL

AS Mr. Crummles had a strange four-legged animal in the inn stables, which he called a pony, and a vehicle of unknown design, on which he bestowed the appellation of four-wheeled phaeton, Nicholas proceeded on his journey next morning with greater ease than he had expected: the manager and himself occupying the front seat: and the Master Crummleses and Smike being packed together behind, in company with a wicker basket defended from wet by a stout oilskin, in which were the broad-swords, pistols, pigtails, nautical costumes, and other professional necessaries of the aforesaid young gentlemen.

The pony took his time upon the road, and—possibly in consequence of his theatrical education—evinced, every now and then, a strong inclination to lie down. However, Mr. Vincent Crummles kept him up pretty well, by jerking the rein, and plying the whip; and when these means failed and the animal came to a stand, the elder Master Crummles got out and kicked him. By dint of these encouragements, he was persuaded to move from time to time, and they jogged on (as Mr. Crummles truly observed) very comfortably for all parties.

"He's a good pony at bottom," said Mr. Crummles, turning to Nicholas.

Digitized by Google

He might have been at bottom, but he certainly was not at top, seeing that his coat was of the roughest and most ill-favoured kind. So Nicholas merely observed that he shouldn't wonder if he was.

"Many and many is the circuit this pony has gone," said Mr. Crummles, flicking him skilfully on the eyelid for old acquaintance' sake. "He is quite one of us. His mother was on the stage."

"Was she?" rejoined Nicholas.

"She ate apple-pie at a circus for upwards of fourteen years," said the manager; "fired pistols, and went to bed in a nightcap; and, in short, took the low comedy entirely. His father was a dancer."

"Was he at all distinguished?"

"Not very," said the manager. "He was rather a low sort of pony. The fact is, he had been originally jobbed out by the day, and he never quite got over his old habits. He was clever in melodrama too, but too broad—too broad. When the mother died, he took the port-wine business."

"The port-wine business!" cried Nicholas.

"Drinking port-wine with the clown," said the manager; "but he was greedy, and one night bit off the bowl of the glass, and choked himself, so his vulgarity was the death of him at last."

The descendant of this ill-starred animal requiring increased attention from Mr. Crummles as he progressed in his day's work, that gentleman had very little time for conversation. Nicholas was thus left at leisure to entertain himself with his own thoughts, until they arrived at the drawbridge at Portsmouth, when Mr. Crummles pulled up.

"We'll get down here," said the manager, "and the boys will take him round to the stable, and call at my lodgings with the luggage. You had better let yours be taken there for the present."

Thanking Mr. Vincent Crummles for his obliging offer,

Digitized by Google

Nicholas jumped out, and, giving Smike his arm, accompanied the manager up High Street on their way to the theatre; feeling nervous and uncomfortable enough at the prospect of an immediate introduction to a scene so new to him.

They passed a great many bills, pasted against the walls and displayed in windows, wherein the names of Mr. Vincent Crummles, and Miss Crummles, were printed in very large letters, and everything else in very small ones; and, turning at length into an entry, in which was a strong smell of orange-peel and lamp-oil, with an under-current of sawdust, groped their way through a dark passage, and, descending a step or two, threaded a little maze of canvas screens and paint-pots, and emerged upon the stage of the Portsmouth Theatre.

"Here we are," said Mr. Crummles.

It was not very light, but Nicholas found himself close to the first entrance on the prompt side, among bare walls, dusty scenes, mildewed clouds, heavily daubed draperies, and dirty floors. He looked about him; ceiling, pit, boxes, gallery, orchestra, fittings, and decorations of every kind,—all looked coarse, cold, gloomy, and wretched.

"Is this a theatre?" whispered Smike, in amazement, "I thought is was a blaze of light and finery."

"Why, so it is," replied Nicholas, hardly less surprised; "but not by day, Smike—not by day."

The manager's voice recalled him from a more careful inspection of the building, to the opposite side of the proscenium, where, at a small mahogany table with rickety legs and of an oblong shape, sat a stout, portly female, apparently between forty and fifty, in a tarnished silk cloak, with her bonnet dangling by the strings in her hand, and her hair (of which she had a great quantity) braided in a large festoon over each temple.

"Mr. Johnson," said the manager (for Nicholas had given

Digitized by Google

the name which Newman Noggs had bestowed upon him in his conversation with Mrs. Kenwigs), "let me introduce Mrs. Vincent Crummles."

"I am glad to see you, sir," said Mrs. Vincent Crummles, in a sepulchral voice. "I am very glad to see you, and still more happy to hail you as a promising member of our corps."

The lady shook Nicholas by the hand as she addressed him in these terms; he saw it was a large one, but had not expected quite such an iron grip as that with which she honoured him.

"And this," said the lady, crossing to Smike, as tragic actresses cross when they obey a stage direction, "and this is the other. You too, are welcome, sir."

"He'll do, I think, my dear?" said the manager, taking a pinch of snuff.

"He is admirable," replied the lady. "An acquisition, indeed."

As Mrs. Vincent Crummles recrossed back to the table, there bounded on to the stage from some mysterious inlet, a little girl in a dirty white frock with tucks up to the knees, short trousers, sandaled shoes, white spencer, pink gauze bonnet, green veil and curl papers; who turned a pirouette, cut twice in the air, turned another pirouette, then, looking off at the opposite wing, shrieked, bounded forward to within six inches of the footlights, and fell into a beautiful attitude of terror, as a shabby gentleman in an old pair of buff slippers came in at one powerful slide, and chattering his teeth, fiercely brandished a walking-stick.

"They are going through the Indian Savage and the Maiden," said Mrs. Crummles.

"Oh!" said the manager, "the little ballet interlude. Very good, go on. A little this way, if you please, Mr. Johnson. That'll do. Now!"

The manager clapped his hands as a signal to proceed, and the savage, becoming ferocious, made a slide towards

Digitized by Google

the maiden; but the maiden avoided him in six twirls, and came down, at the end of the last one, upon the very points of her toes. This seemed to make some impression upon the savage; for, after a little more ferocity and chasing of the maiden into corners, he began to relent, and stroked his face several times with his right thumb and four fingers, thereby intimating that he was struck with admiration of the maiden's beauty. Acting upon the impulse of this passion, he (the savage) began to hit himself severe thumps in the chest, and to exhibit other indications of being desperately in love, which being rather a prosy proceeding, was very likely the cause of the maiden's falling asleep; whether it was or no, asleep she did fall, sound as a church, on a sloping bank, and the savage perceiving it, leant his left ear on his left hand, and nodded sideways, to intimate to all whom it might concern that she *was* asleep, and no shamming. Being left to himself, the savage had a dance, all alone. Just as he left off, the maiden woke up, rubbed her eyes, got off the bank, and had a dance all alone too—such a dance that the savage looked on in ecstasy all the while, and when it was done, plucked from a neighbouring tree some botanical curiosity, resembling a small pickled cabbage, and offered it to the maiden, who at first wouldn't have it, but on the savage shedding tears relented. Then the savage jumped for joy; then the maiden jumped for rapture at the sweet smell of the pickled cabbage. Then the savage and the maiden danced violently together, and, finally, the savage dropped down on one knee, and the maiden stood on one leg upon his other knee; thus concluding the ballet, and leaving the spectators in a state of pleasing uncertainty, whether she would ultimately marry the savage, or return to her friends.

"Very well indeed," said Mr. Crummles; "bravo!"

"Bravo!" cried Nicholas, resolved to make the best of everything. "Beautiful!"

Digitized by Google

"This, sir," said Mr. Vincent Crummles, bringing the maiden forward, "this is the infant phenomenon—Miss Ninetta Crummles."

"Your daughter?" inquired Nicholas.

"My daughter—my daughter," replied Mr. Vincent Crummles; "the idol of every place we go into, sir. We have had complimentary letters about this girl, sir, from the nobility and gentry of almost every town in England."

"I am not surprised at that," said Nicholas; "she must be quite a natural genius."

"Quite a——!" Mr. Crummles stopped: language was not powerful enough to describe the infant phenomenon. "I'll tell you what, sir," he said; "the talent of this child is not to be imagined. She must be seen, sir—seen—to be ever so faintly appreciated. There; go to your mother, my dear."

"May I ask how old she is?" inquired Nicholas.

"You may, sir," replied Mr. Crummles, looking steadily in his questioner's face, as some men do when they have doubts about being implicitly believed in what they are going to say. "She is ten years of age, sir."

"Not more?"

"Not a day."

"Dear me!" said Nicholas, "it's extraordinary."

It was; for the infant phenomenon, though of short stature, had a comparatively aged countenance, and had moreover been precisely the same age—not perhaps to the full extent of the memory of the oldest inhabitant, but certainly for five good years. But she had been kept up late every night, and put upon an unlimited allowance of gin-and-water from infancy, to prevent her growing tall, and perhaps this system of training had produced in the infant phenomenon these additional phenomena.

While this short dialogue was going on, the gentleman who had enacted the savage, came up, with his walking

Digitized by Google

shoes on his feet, and his slippers in his hand, to within a few paces, as if desirous to join in the conversation. Deeming this a good opportunity, he put in his word.

"Talent there, sir!" said the savage, nodding towards Miss Crummles.

Nicholas assented.

"Ah!" said the actor, setting his teeth together, and drawing in his breath with a hissing sound, "she oughtn't to be in the provinces, she oughtn't."

"What do you mean?" asked the manager.

"I mean to say," replied the other, warmly, "that she is too good for country boards, and that she ought to be in one of the large houses in London, or nowhere; and I tell you more, without mincing the matter, that if it wasn't for envy and jealousy in some quarter that you know of, she would be. Perhaps you'll introduce me here, Mr. Crummles."

"Mr. Folair," said the manager, presenting him to Nicholas.

"Happy to know you, sir." Mr. Folair touched the brim of his hat with his forefinger, and then shook hands. "A recruit, sir, I understand?"

"Did you ever see such a set-out as that?" whispered the actor, drawing him away, as Crummles left them to speak to his wife.

"As what?"

Mr. Folair made a funny face from his pantomime collection, and pointed over his shoulder.

"You don't mean the infant phenomenon?"

"Infant humbug, sir," replied Mr. Folair. "There isn't a female child of common sharpness in a charity school, that couldn't do better than that. She may thank her stars she was born a manager's daughter."

"You seem to take it to heart," observed Nicholas, with a smile.

"Yes, by Jove, and well I may," said Mr. Folair, drawing

Digitized by Google

his arm through his, and walking him up and down the stage. "Isn't it enough to make a man crusty to see that little sprawler put up in the best business every night, and actually keeping money out of the house, by being forced down the people's throats, while other people are passed over? Isn't it extraordinary to see a man's confounded family conceit blinding him, even to his own interest? Why I *know* of fifteen and sixpence that came to Southampton one night last month, to see me dance the Highland Fling; and what's the consequence? I've never been put up in it since—never once—while the 'infant phenomenon' has been grinning through artificial flowers at five people and a baby in the pit, and two boys in the gallery, every night."

"If I may judge from what I have seen of you," said Nicholas, "you must be a valuable member of the company."

"Oh!" replied Mr. Folair, beating his slippers together, to knock the dust out; "I *can* come it pretty well—nobody better perhaps, in my own line—but having such business as one gets here, is like putting lead on one's feet instead of chalk, and dancing in fetters without the credit of it. Holloa, old fellow, how are you?"

The gentleman addressed in these latter words, was a dark-complexioned man, inclining indeed to sallow, with long thick black hair, and very evident indications (although he was close shaved) of a stiff beard, and whiskers of the same deep shade. His age did not appear to exceed thirty, though many at first sight would have considered him much older, as his face was long, and very pale, from the constant application of stage paint. He wore a checked shirt, an old green coat with new gilt buttons, a neckerchief of broad red and green stripes, and full blue trousers; he carried, too, a common ash walking-stick, apparently more for show than use, as he flourished it about, with the hooked end downwards, except when he raised it for a few seconds, and throwing himself into a fencing attitude, made a

Digitized by Google

pass or two at the side-scenes, or at any other object, animate or inanimate, that chanced to afford him a pretty good mark at the moment.

"Well, Tommy," said this gentleman, making a thrust at his friend, who parried it dexterously with his slipper, "what's the news?"

"A new appearance, that's all," replied Mr. Folair, looking at Nicholas.

"Do the honours, Tommy, do the honours," said the other gentleman, tapping him reproachfully on the crown of the hat with his stick.

"This is Mr. Lenville, who does our first tragedy, Mr. Johnson," said the pantomimist.

"Except when old bricks and mortar takes it into his head to do it himself, you should add, Tommy," remarked Mr. Lenville. "You know who bricks and mortar is, I suppose, sir?'

"I do not, indeed," replied Nicholas.

"We call Crummles that, because his style of acting is rather in the heavy and ponderous way," said Mr. Lenville. "I mustn't be cracking jokes though, for I've got a part of twelve lengths here, which I must be up in to-morrow night, and I haven't had time to look at it yet; I'm a confounded quick study, that's one comfort."

Consoling himself with this reflection, Mr. Lenville drew from his coat-pocket a greasy and crumpled manuscript, and, having made another pass at his friend, proceeded to walk to and fro conning it to himself and indulging occasionally in such appropriate action as his imagination and the text suggested.

A pretty general muster of the company had by this time taken place; for besides Mr. Lenville and his friend Tommy, there were present, a slim young gentleman with weak eyes, who played the low-spirited lovers and sang tenor songs, and who had come arm-in-arm with the comic countryman

Digitized by Google

—a man with a turned-up nose, large mouth, broad face and staring eyes. Making himself very amiable to the infant phenomenon, was an inebriated elderly gentleman in the last depths of shabbiness, who played the calm and virtuous old men; and paying especial court to Mrs. Crummles was another elderly gentleman, a shade more respectable, who played the irascible old men—those funny fellows who have nephews in the army, and perpetually run about with thick sticks to compel them to marry heiresses. Besides these, there was a roving-looking person in a rough great-coat, who strode up and down in front of the lamps, flourishing a dress-cane, and rattling away, in an undertone, with great vivacity for the amusement of an ideal audience. He was not quite so young as he had been, and his figure was rather running to seed, but there was an air of exaggerated gentility about him, which bespoke the hero of swaggering comedy. There was, also, a little group of three or four young men, with lantern jaws and thick eyebrows, who were conversing in one corner; but they seemed to be of secondary importance, and laughed and talked together without attracting any attention.

The ladies were gathered in a little knot by themselves round the rickety table before mentioned. There was Miss Snevellicci—who could do anything, from a medley dance to Lady Macbeth, and also always played some part in blue silk knee-smalls at her benefit—glancing, from the depths of her coal-scuttle straw bonnet, at Nicholas, and affecting to be absorbed in the recital of a diverting story to her friend Miss Ledrook, who had brought her work, and was making up a ruff in the most natural manner possible. There was Miss Belvawney—who seldom aspired to speaking parts, and usually went on as a page in white silk hose, to stand with one leg bent, and contemplate the audience, or to go in and out after Mr. Crummles in stately tragedy—twisting up the ringlets of the beautiful Miss Bravassa, who

Digitized by Google

had once had her likeness taken "in character" by an engraver's apprentice, whereof impressions were hung up for sale in the pastry-cook's window, and the greengrocer's, and at the circulating library, and the box-office, whenever the announce bills came out for her annual night. There was Mrs. Lenville, in a very limp bonnet and veil, decidedly in that way in which she would wish to be if she truly loved Mr. Lenville; there was Miss Gazingi, with an imitation ermine boa tied in a loose knot round her neck, flogging Mr. Crummles, junior, with both ends, in fun. Lastly, there was Mrs. Grudden in a brown cloth pelisse and a beaver bonnet who assisted Mrs. Crummles in her domestic affairs and took money at the doors, and dressed the ladies, and swept the house, and held the prompt book when everybody else was on for the last scene, and acted any kind of part on any emergency without ever learning it, and was put down in the bills under any name or names whatever, that occurred to Mr. Crummles as looking well in print.

Mr. Folair having obligingly confided these particulars to Nicholas, left him to mingle with his fellows; the work of personal introduction was completed by Mr. Vincent Crummles, who publicly heralded the new actor as a prodigy of genius and learning.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Snevellicci, sidling towards Nicholas, "but did you ever play at Canterbury?"

"I never did," replied Nicholas.

"I recollect meeting a gentleman at Canterbury," said Miss Snevellicci, "only for a few moments, for I was leaving the company as he joined it, so like you that I felt almost certain it was the same."

"I see you now, for the first time," rejoined Nicholas with all due gallantry. "I am sure I never saw you before; I couldn't have forgotten it."

"Oh, I'm sure—it's very flattering of you to say so," retorted Miss Snevellicci with a graceful bend. "Now I

Digitized by Google

look at you again, I see that the gentleman at Canterbury hadn't the same eyes as you—you'll think me very foolish for taking notice of such things, won't you?"

"Not at all," said Nicholas. "How can I feel otherwise than flattered by your notice in any way?"

"Oh! you men are such vain creatures!" cried Miss Snevellicci. Whereupon, she became charmingly confused, and, pulling out her pocket-handkerchief from a faded pink silk reticule with a gilt clasp, called to Miss Ledrook—

"Led, my dear," said Miss Snevellicci.

"Well, what is the matter?" said Miss Ledrook.

"It's not the same."

"Not the same what?"

"Canterbury—you know what I mean. Come here! I want to speak to you."

But Miss Ledrook wouldn't come to Miss Snevellicci, so Miss Snevellicci was obliged to go to Miss Ledrook, which she did, in a skipping manner that was quite fascinating; and Miss Ledrook evidently joked Miss Snevellicci about being struck with Nicholas; for, after some playful whispering, Miss Snevellicci hit Miss Ledrook very hard on the backs of her hands, and retired up, in a state of pleasing confusion.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Vincent Crummles, who had been writing on a piece of paper "we'll call the Mortal Struggle to-morrow at ten; everybody for the procession. Intrigue, and Ways and Means, you're all up in, so we shall only want one rehearsal. Everybody at ten, if you please."

"Everybody at ten," repeated Mrs. Grudden, looking about her.

"On Monday morning we shall read a new piece," said Mr. Crummles; "the name's not known yet, but everybody will have a good part. Mr. Johnson will take care of that."

Digitized by Google

"Hallo!" said Nicholas, starting, "I——"

"On Monday morning," repeated Mr. Crummles, raising his voice, to drown the unfortunate Mr. Johnson's remonstrance; "that'll do, ladies and gentlemen."

The ladies and gentlemen required no second notice to quit; and, in a few minutes, the theatre was deserted, save by the Crummles family, Nicholas, and Smike.

"Upon my word," said Nicholas, taking the manager aside, "I don't think I can be ready by Monday."

"Pooh, pooh," replied Mr. Crummles.

"But really I can't," returned Nicholas; "my invention is not accustomed to these demands, or possibly I might produce——"

"Invention! what the devil's that got to do with it!" cried the manager, hastily.

"Everything, my dear sir."

"Nothing, my dear sir," retorted the manager, with evident impatience. "Do you understand French?"

"Perfectly well."

"Very good," said the manager, opening the table-drawer, and giving a roll of paper from it to Nicholas. "There! Just turn that into English, and put your name on the title-page. Damn me," said Mr. Crummles, angrily, "if I haven't often said that I wouldn't have a man or woman in my company that wasn't master of the language, so that they might learn it from the original, and play it in English, and save all this trouble and expense."

Nicholas smiled and pocketed the play.

"What are you going to do about your lodgings?" said Mr. Crummles.

Nicholas could not help thinking that, for the first week, it would be an uncommon convenience to have a turn-up bedstead in the pit, but he merely remarked that he had not turned his thoughts that way.

"Come home with me then," said Mr. Crummles, "and

Digitized by Google

my boys shall go with you after dinner, and show you the most likely place."

The offer was not to be refused; Nicholas and Mr. Crummles gave Mrs. Crummles an arm each, and walked up the street in stately array. Smike, the boys, and the phenomenon, went home by a shorter cut, and Mrs. Grudden remained behind to take some cold Irish stew and a pint of porter in the box-office.

Mrs. Crummles trod the pavement as if she were going to immediate execution with an animating consciousness of innocence, and that heroic fortitude which virtue alone inspires. Mr. Crummles, on the other hand, assumed the look and gait of a hardened despot; but they both attracted some notice from many of the passers-by, and when they heard a whisper of "Mr. and Mrs. Crummles!" or saw a little boy run back to stare them in the face, the severe expression of their countenances relaxed, for they felt it was popularity.

Mr. Crummles lived in Saint Thomas's Street, at the house of one Bulph, a pilot, who sported a boat-green door, with window-frames of the same colour, and had the little finger of a drowned man on his parlour mantel-shelf, with other maritime and natural curiosities. He displayed also a brass knocker, a brass plate, and a brass bell-handle, all very bright and shining; and had a mast, with a vane on the top of it, in his back yard.

"You are welcome," said Mrs. Crummles, turning round to Nicholas when they reached the bow-windowed front room on the first floor.

Nicholas bowed his acknowledgments, and was unfeignedly glad to see the cloth laid.

"We have but a shoulder of mutton with onion sauce," said Mrs. Crummles, in the same charnel-house voice; "but such as our dinner is, we beg you to partake of it."

"You are very good," replied Nicholas, "I shall do it ample justice."

. . . .

Digitized by Google

"Vincent," said Mrs. Crummles, "what is the hour?"

"Five minutes past dinner-time," said Mr. Crummles.

Mrs. Crummles rang the bell. "Let the mutton and onion sauce appear."

The slave who attended upon Mr. Bulph's lodgers, disappeared, and after a short interval re-appeared with the festive banquet. Nicholas and the infant phenomenon opposed each other at the pembroke-table, and Smike and the Master Crummleses dined on the sofa bedstead.

"Are they very theatrical people here?" asked Nicholas.

"No," replied Mr. Crummles, shaking his head, "far from it—far from it."

"I pity them," observed Mrs. Crummles.

"So do I," said Nicholas; "if they have no relish for theatrical entertainments, properly conducted."

"Then they have none, sir," rejoined Mr. Crummles. "To the infant's benefit, last year, on which occasion she repeated three of her most popular characters, and also appeared in the Fairy Porcupine, as originally performed by her, there was a house of no more than four pound twelve."

"Is it possible?" cried Nicholas.

"And two pound of that was trust, pa," said the phenomenon.

"And two pound of that was trust," repeated Mr. Crummles. "Mrs. Crummles herself has played to mere handfuls."

"But they are always a taking audience, Vincent," said the manager's wife.

"Most audiences are, when they have good acting—real good acting—the regular thing," replied Mr. Crummles, forcibly.

"Do you give lesssons, ma'am?" inquired Nicholas.

"I do," said Mrs. Crummles.

"There is no teaching here, I suppose?"

"There has been," said Mrs. Crummles. "I have re-

Digitized by Google

ceived pupils here. I imparted tuition to the daughter of a dealer in ships' provision; but it afterwards appeared that she was insane when she first came to me. It was very extraordinary that she should come, under such circumstances."

Not feeling quite so sure of that, Nicholas thought it best to hold his peace.

"Let me see," said the manager cogitating after dinner. "Would you like some nice little part with the infant?"

"You are very good," replied Nicholas hastily; "but I think perhaps it would be better if I had somebody of my own size at first, in case I should turn out awkward. I should feel more at home perhaps."

"True," said the manager. "Perhaps you would. And you could play up to the infant, in time, you know."

"Certainly," replied Nicholas: devoutly hoping that it would be a very long time before he was honoured with this distinction.

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do," said Mr. Crummles. "You shall study Romeo when you've done that piece—don't forget to throw the pump and tubs in by-the-bye—Juliet Miss Snevellicci, old Grudden the nurse.—Yes, that'll do very well. Rover too;—you might get up Rover while you were about it, and Cassio, and Jeremy Diddler. You can easily knock them off; one part helps the other so much. Here they are, cues and all."

With these hasty general directions Mr. Crummles thrust a number of little books into the faltering hands of Nicholas, and bidding his eldest son go with him and show where lodgings were to be had, shook him by the hand, and wished him good night.

There is no lack of comfortable furnished apartments in Portsmouth, and no difficulty in finding some that are proportionate to very slender finances; but the former were too good, and the latter too bad, and they went into so many

Digitized by Google

houses, and came out unsuited, that Nicholas seriously began to think he should be obliged to ask permission to spend the night in the theatre, after all.

Eventually, however, they stumbled upon two small rooms up three pair of stairs, or rather two pair and a ladder, at a tobacconist's shop, on the Common Hard: a dirty street leading down to the dockyard. These Nicholas engaged, only too happy to have escaped any request for payment of a week's rent beforehand.

"There! Lay down our personal property, Smike," he said, after showing young Crummles downstairs. "We have fallen upon strange times, and Heaven only knows the end of them; but I am tired with the events of these three days and will postpone reflection till to-morrow—if I can."

2.—OF THE GREAT BESPEAK FOR MISS SNEVELLICCI, AND THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF NICHOLAS UPON ANY STAGE

Nicholas was up betimes in the morning; but he had scarcely begun to dress, notwithstanding, when he heard footsteps ascending the stairs, and was presently saluted by the voices of Mr. Folair the pantomimist, and Mr. Lenville the tragedian.

"House, house, house!" cried Mr. Folair.

"What, ho! within there!" said Mr. Lenville, in a deep voice.

Confound these fellows! thought Nicholas; they have come to breakfast, I suppose. "I'll open the door directly, if you'll wait an instant."

The gentlemen entreated him not to hurry himself; and, to beguile the interval had a fencing-bout with their walking-sticks on the very small landing-place: to the unspeakable discomposure of all the other lodgers downstairs.

"Here, come in," said Nicholas, when he had completed

Digitized by Google

his toilet. "In the name of all that's horrible, don't make that noise outside."

"An uncommon snug little box this," said Mr. Lenville, stepping into the front room, and taking his hat off, before he could get in at all. "Pernicious snug."

"For a man at all particular in such matters, it might be a trifle too snug," said Nicholas; "for, although it is, undoubtedly, a great convenience to be able to reach anything you want from the ceiling or the floor, or either side of the room, without having to move from your chair, still these advantages can only be had in an apartment of the most limited size."

"It isn't a bit too confined for a single man," returned Mr. Lenville. "That reminds me,—my wife, Mr. Johnson,—I hope she'll have some good part in this piece of yours?"

"I glanced at the French copy last night," said Nicholas. "It looks very good, I think."

"What do you mean to do for me, old fellow?" asked Mr. Lenville, poking the struggling fire with his walking-stick, and afterwards wiping it on the skirt of his coat. "Anything in the gruff and grumble way?"

"You turn your wife and child out of doors," said Nicholas; "and in a fit of rage and jealousy, stab your eldest son in the library."

"Do I though!" exclaimed Mr. Lenville. "That's very good business."

"After which," said Nicholas, "you are troubled with remorse till the last act and then you make up your mind to destroy yourself. But, just as you are raising the pistol to your head, a clock strikes—ten."

"I see," cried Mr. Lenville. "Very good."

"You pause," said Nicholas; "you recollect to have heard a clock strike ten in your infancy. The pistol falls from your hand—you are overcome—you burst into tears, and

Digitized by Google

become a virtuous and exemplary character for ever afterwards."

"Capital!" said Mr. Lenville: "that's a sure card, a sure card. Get the curtain down with a touch of nature like that—and it'll be a triumphant success."

"Is there anything good for me?" inquired Mr. Folair, anxiously.

"Let me see," said Nicholas. "You play the faithful and attached servant; you are turned out of doors with the wife and child."

"Always coupled with that infernal phenomenon," sighed Mr. Folair; "and we go into poor lodgings, where I won't take any wages, and talk sentiment, I suppose?"

"Why—yes," replied Nicholas: "that is the course of the piece."

"I must have a dance of some kind, you know," said Mr. Folair. "You'll have to introduce one for the phenomenon, so you'd better make a *pas de deux*, and save time."

"There's nothing easier than that," said Mr. Lenville, observing the disturbed looks of the young dramatist.

"Upon my word I don't see how it's to be done," rejoined Nicholas.

"Why, isn't it obvious?" reasoned Mr. Lenville. "Gadzooks, who can help seeing the way to do it?—you astonish me! You get the distressed lady, and the little child, and the attached servant, into the poor lodgings, don't you? —Well, look here. The distressed lady sinks into a chair and buries her face in her pocket-handkerchief—'What makes you weep, mama?' says the child. 'Don't weep mama, or you'll make me weep too!'—'And me!' says the faithful servant, rubbing his eyes with his arm. 'What can we do to raise your spirits, dear mama?' says the little child. 'Aye, what *can* we do?' says the faithful servant. 'Oh, Pierre!' says the distressed lady; 'would that I could shake off these painful thoughts.'—'Try, ma'am, try,' says

Digitized by Google

the faithful servant; 'rouse yourself, ma'am; be amused.'—'I will,' says the lady, 'I will learn to suffer with fortitude. Do you remember that dance, my honest friend, which, in happier days, you practised with this sweet angel? It never failed to calm my spirits then. Oh! let me see it once again before I die!'—There it is—cue for the band, *before I die*,—and off they go. That's the regular thing: isn't it, Tommy?"

"That's it," replied Mr. Folair. "The distressed lady, overpowered by old recollections, faints at the end of the dance, and you close in with a picture."

Profiting by these and other lessons, which were the result of the personal experience of the two actors, Nicholas willingly gave them the best breakfast he could, and, when he at length got rid of them, applied himself to his task: by no means displeased to find that it was so much easier than he had at first supposed. He worked very hard all day, and did not leave his room until the evening, when he went down to the theatre, whither Smike had repaired before him to go on with another gentleman as a general rebellion.

Here all the people were so much changed, that he scarcely knew them. False hair, false colour, false calves, false muscles—they had become different beings. Mr. Lenville was a blooming warrior of most exquisite proportions; Mr. Crummles, his large face shaded by a profusion of black hair, a Highland outlaw of most majestic bearing; one of the old gentlemen a gaoler, and the other a venerable patriarch; the comic countryman, a fighting-man of great valour, relieved by a touch of humour; each of the Master Crummles a prince in his own right; and the low-spirited lover, a desponding captive. There was a gorgeous banquet ready spread for the third act, consisting of two pasteboard vases, one plate of biscuits, a black bottle and a vinegar cruet; and, in short, everything was on a scale of the utmost splendour and preparation.

Nicholas was standing with his back to the curtain, now

Digitized by Google

contemplating the first scene, which was a Gothic archway, about two feet shorter than Mr. Crummles, through which that gentleman was to make his first entrance, and now listening to a couple of people who were cracking nuts in the gallery, wondering whether they made the whole audience, when the manager himself walked familiarly up and accosted him.

"Been in front to-night?" said Mr. Crummles.

"No," replied Nicholas, "not yet. I am going to see the play."

"We've had a pretty good Let," said Mr. Crummles. "Four front places in the centre, and the whole of the stage-box."

"Oh, indeed!" said Nicholas; "a family, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Crummles, "yes. It's an affecting thing. There are six children and they never come unless the phenomenon plays."

It would have been difficult for any party, family or otherwise, to have visited the theatre on a night when the phenomenon did *not* play, inasmuch as she always sustained one, and not uncommonly two or three characters, every night; but Nicholas, sympathising with the feelings of a father, refrained from hinting at this trifling circumstance, and Mr. Crummles continued to talk, uninterrupted by him.

"Six," said that gentleman; "Pa and Ma eight, aunt nine, governess ten, grandfather and grandmother twelve. Then, there's the footman, who stands outside, with a bag of oranges and a jug of toast-and-water, and sees the play for nothing through the little pane of glass in the box-door—it's cheap at a guinea; they gain by taking a box."

"I wonder you allow so many," observed Nicholas.

"There's no help for it," replied Mr. Crummles; "it's always expected in the country. If there are six children, six people come to hold them in their laps. A family-box carries double always. Ring in the orchestra, Grudden!"

Digitized by Google

That useful lady did as she was requested, and shortly afterwards the tuning of three fiddles was heard. Which process having been protracted as long as it was supposed that the patience of the audience could possibly bear it, was put a stop to by another jerk of the bell, which, being the signal to begin in earnest, set the orchestra playing a variety of popular airs, with involuntary variations.

If Nicholas had been astonished at the alteration for the better which the gentlemen displayed, the transformation of the ladies was still more extraordinary. When, from a snug corner of the manager's box, he beheld Miss Snevellicci in all the glories of white muslin with a golden hem, and Mrs. Crummles in all the dignity of the outlaw's wife, and Miss Bravassa in all the sweetness of Miss Snevellicci's confidential friend, and Miss Belvawney in the white silks of a page doing duty everywhere, and swearing to live and die in the service of everybody, he could scarcely contain his admiration, which testified itself in great applause, and the closest possible attention to the business of the scene. The plot was most interesting. It belonged to no particular age, people, or country, and was perhaps the most delightful on that account, as nobody's previous information could afford the remotest glimmering of what would ever come of it. An outlaw had been very successful in doing something somewhere, and came home, in triumph, to the sound of shouts and fiddles, to greet his wife—a lady of masculine mind, who talked a good deal about her father's bones, which it seemed were unburied, though whether from a peculiar taste on the part of the old gentleman himself, or the reprehensible neglect of his relations, did not appear. The outlaw's wife was, somehow or other, mixed up with a patriarch, living in a castle a long way off, and this patriarch was the father of several of the characters, but he didn't exactly know which, and was uncertain whether he had brought up the right ones in his castle, or the wrong ones;

Digitized by Google

he rather inclined to the latter opinion, and, being uneasy, relieved his mind with a banquet during which solemnity somebody in a cloak said "Beware!" which somebody was known by nobody (except the audience) to be the outlaw himself, who had come there, for reasons unexplained, but possibly with an eye to the spoons. There was an agreeable little surprise in the way of certain love passages between the desponding captive and Miss Snevellicci, and the comic fighting-man and Miss Bravassa; besides which, Mr. Lenville had several very tragic scenes in the dark, while on throat-cutting expeditions, which were all baffled by the skill and bravery of the comic fighting-man (who overheard whatever was said all through the piece) and the intrepidity of Miss Snevellicci, who adopted tights, and therein repaired to the prison of her captive lover, with a small basket of refreshments and a dark lantern. At last, it came out that the patriarch was the man who had treated the bones of the outlaw's father-in-law with so much disrespect, for which cause and reason the outlaw's wife repaired to his castle to kill him, and so got into a dark room, where, after a good deal of groping in the dark, everybody got hold of everybody else, and took them for somebody besides, which occasioned a vast quantity of confusion, with some pistolling, loss of life, and torchlight; after which, the patriarch came forward, and observing, with a knowing look, that he knew all about his children now, and would tell them when they got inside, said that there could not be a more appropriate occasion for marrying the young people than that; and therefore he joined their hands, with the full consent of the indefatigable page, who (being the only other person surviving) pointed with his cap into the clouds, and his right hand to the ground; thereby invoking a blessing and giving the cue for the curtain to come down, which it did, amidst general applause.

"What did you think of that?" asked Mr. Crummles,

Digitized by Google

when Nicholas went round to the stage again. Mr. Crummles was very red and hot, for your outlaws are desperate fellows to shout.

"I think it was very capital indeed," replied Nicholas; "Miss Snevellicci in particular was uncommonly good."

"She's a genius," said Mr. Crummles; "quite a genius, that girl. By-the-bye, I've been thinking of bringing out that piece of yours on her bespeak night."

"When?" asked Nicholas.

"The night of her bespeak. Her benefit night, when her friends and patrons bespeak the play," said Mr. Crummles.

"Oh! I understand," replied Nicholas.

"You see," said Mr. Crummles, "it's sure to go, on such an occasion, and even if it should not work up quite as well as we expect, why it will be her risk, you know, and not ours."

"Yours, you mean," said Nicholas.

"I said mine, didn't I?" returned Mr. Crummles. "Next Monday week. What do you say? You'll have done it, and are sure to be up in the lover's part, long before that time."

"I don't know about 'long before,'" replied Nicholas; "but *by* that time I think I can undertake to be ready."

"Very good," pursued Mr. Crummles, "then we'll call that settled. Now, I want to ask you something else. There's a little—what shall I call it—a little canvassing takes place on these occasions."

"Among the patrons, I suppose?" said Nicholas.

"Among the patrons; and the fact is, that Snevellicci has had so many bespeaks in this place, that she wants an attraction. She had a bespeak when her mother-in-law died, and a bespeak when her uncle died; and Mrs. Crummles and myself have had bespeaks on the anniversary of the phenomenon's birthday, and our wedding-day, and occasions of that description, so that, in fact, there's some difficulty in

Digitized by Google

getting a good one. Now, won't you help this poor girl, Mr. Johnson?" said Crummles, sitting himself down on a drum, and taking a great pinch of snuff, as he looked him steadily in the face.

"How do you mean?" rejoined Nicholas.

"Don't you think you could spare half-an-hour to-morrow morning, to call with her at the houses of one or two of the principal people?" murmured the manager in a persuasive tone.

"Oh dear me," said Nicholas, with an air of very strong objection, "I shouldn't like to do that."

"The infant will accompany her," said Mr. Crummles. "The moment it was suggested to me, I gave permission for the infant to go. There will not be the smallest impropriety —Miss Snevellicci, sir, is the very soul of honour. It would be of material service—the gentleman from London—author of the new piece—actor in the new piece—first appearance on any boards—it would lead to a great bespeak, Mr. Johnson."

"I am very sorry to throw a damp upon the prospects of anybody, and more especially a lady," replied Nicholas; "but really I must decidedly object to making one of the canvassing party."

"What does Mr. Johnson say, Vincent?" inquired a voice close to his ear; and, looking round, he found Mrs. Crummles and Miss Snevellicci herself standing behind him.

"He has some objection, my dear," replied Mr. Crummles, looking at Nicholas.

"Objection!" exclaimed Mrs. Crummles. "Can it be possible?"

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Miss Snevellicci. "You surely are not so cruel—oh, dear me!—Well I—to think of that now, after all one's looking forward to it!"

"Mr. Johnson will not persist, my dear," said Mrs. Crummles. "Think better of him than to suppose it.

Digitized by Google

Gallantry, humanity, all the best feelings of his nature, must be enlisted in this interesting cause."

"Which moves even a manager," said Mr. Crummles, smiling.

"And a manager's wife," added Mrs. Crummles, in her accustomed tragedy tones. "Come, come, you will relent, I know you will."

"It is not in my nature," said Nicholas, moved by these appeals, "to resist any entreaty, unless it is to do something positively wrong; and, beyond a feeling of pride, I know nothing which should prevent my doing this. I know nobody here, and nobody knows me. So be it then. I yield."

Miss Snevellicci was at once overwhelmed with blushes and expressions of gratitude, of which latter commodity neither Mr. nor Mrs. Crummles was by any means sparing. It was arranged that Nicholas should call upon her, at her lodgings, at eleven next morning, and soon after they parted: he to return home to his authorship: Miss Snevellicci to dress for the after-piece: and the disinterested manager and his wife to discuss the probable gains of the forthcoming bespeak, of which they were to have two-thirds of the profits by solemn treaty of agreement.

At the stipulated hour next morning, Nicholas repaired to the lodgings of Miss Snevellicci, which were in a place called Lombard Street, at the house of a tailor. A strong smell of ironing pervaded the little passage; and the tailor's daughter, who opened the door, appeared in that flutter of spirits which is so often attendant upon the periodical getting up of a family's linen.

"Miss Snevellicci lives here, I believe?" said Nicholas, when the door was opened.

The tailor's daughter replied in the affirmative.

"Will you have the goodness to let her know that Mr. Johnson is here?" said Nicholas.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, if you please, you're to come upstairs," replied the tailor's daughter, with a smile.

Nicholas followed the young lady, and was shown into a small apartment on the first floor, communicating with a back room; in which, as he judged from a certain half-subdued clinking sound, as of cups and saucers, Miss Snevellicci was then taking her breakfast in bed.

"You're to wait, if you please," said the tailor's daughter, after a short period of absence, during which the clinking in the back room had ceased, and had been succeeded by whispering—"She won't be long."

As she spoke she pulled up the window-blind, and having by this means (as she thought) diverted Mr. Johnson's attention from the room to the street, caught up some articles which were airing on the fender, and had very much the appearance of stockings, and darted off.

As there were not many objects of interest outside the window Nicholas looked about the room with more curiosity than he might otherwise have bestowed upon it. On the sofa lay an old guitar, several thumbed pieces of music, and a scattered litter of curl-papers: together with a confused heap of play-bills, and a pair of soiled white satin shoes with large blue rosettes. Hanging over the back of a chair was a half-finished muslin apron with little pockets ornamented with red ribbons, such as waiting-women wear on the stage, and (by consequence) are never seen with anywhere else. In one corner stood the diminutive pair of top-boots in which Miss Snevellicci was accustomed to enact the little jockey, and, folded on a chair hard by, was a small parcel which bore a very suspicious resemblance to the companion smalls.

But the most interesting object of all, was, perhaps, the open scrap-book, displayed in the midst of some theatrical duodecimos that were strewn upon the table; and pasted into which scrap-book were various critical notices of Miss

Digitized by Google

Snevellicci's acting, extracted from different provincial journals, together with one poetic address in her honour commencing—

> Sing, God of Love, and tell me in what dearth
> Thrice-gifted SNEVELLICCI came on earth,
> To thrill us with her smile, her tear, her eye,
> Sing, God of Love, and tell me quickly why.

Besides this effusion, there were innumerable complimentary allusions, also extracted from newspapers, such as—"We observe from an advertisement in another part of our paper of to-day, that the charming and highly-talented Miss Snevellicci takes her benefit on Wednesday, for which occasion she has put forth a bill of fare that might kindle exhilaration in the breast of a misanthrope. In the confidence that our fellow-townsmen have not lost that high appreciation of public utility and private worth for which they have long been so pre-eminently distinguished, we predict that this charming actress will be greeted with a bumper." "To Correspondents.—J. S. is misinformed when he supposes that the highly-gifted and beautiful Miss Snevellicci, nightly captivating all hearts at our pretty and commodious little theatre, is *not* the same lady to whom the young gentleman of immense fortune, residing within a hundred miles of the good city of York, lately made honourable proposals. We have reason to know that Miss Snevellicci *is* the lady who was implicated in that mysterious and romantic affair, and whose conduct on that occasion did no less honour to her head and heart, than do her histrionic triumphs to her brilliant genius." A copious assortment of such paragraphs as these, with long bills of benefits all ending with "Come Early," in large capitals, formed the principal contents of Miss Snevellicci's scrap-book.

Nicholas had read a great many of these scraps, and was absorbed in a circumstantial and melancholy account of the

Digitized by Google

train of events which had led to Miss Snevellicci's spraining her ankle by slipping on a piece of orange-peel flung by a monster in human form (so the paper said), upon the stage at Winchester,—when the young lady herself, attired in the coal-scuttle bonnet and walking-dress complete, tripped into the room with a thousand apologies for having detained him so long after the appointed time.

"But really," said Miss Snevellicci, "my darling Led, who lives with me here, was taken so very ill in the night that I thought she would have expired in my arms."

"Such a fate is almost to be envied," returned Nicholas "but I am very sorry to hear it nevertheless."

"What a creature you are to flatter!" said Miss Snevellicci, buttoning her glove in much confusion.

"If it be flattery to admire your charms and accomplishments," rejoined Nicholas, laying his hand upon the scrap-book, "you have better specimens of it here."

"Oh you cruel creature, to read such things as those! I'm almost ashamed to look you in the face afterwards, positively I am," said Miss Snevellicci, seizing the book and putting it away in a closet. "How careless of Led! How could she be so naughty!"

"I thought you had kindly left it here, on purpose for me to read," said Nicholas. And really it did seem possible.

"I wouldn't have had you see it for the world!" rejoined Miss Snevellicci. "I never was so vexed—never! But she is such a careless thing, there's no trusting her."

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of the phenomenon, who had discreetly remained in the bedroom up to this moment, and now presented herself, with much grace and lightness, bearing in her hand a very little green parasol with a broad fringe border, and no handle. After a few words of course, they sallied into the street.

The phenomenon was rather a troublesome companion, for first the right sandal came down, and then the left,

Digitized by Google

and these mischances being repaired, one leg of the little white trousers was discovered to be longer than the other; besides these accidents, the green parasol was dropped down an iron grating, and only fished up again, with great difficulty and by dint of much exertion. However, it was impossible to scold her, as she was the manager's daughter, so Nicholas took it all in perfect good humour, and walked on, with Miss Snevellicci, arm in arm on one side, and the offending infant on the other.

The first house to which they bent their steps, was situated in a terrace of respectable appearance. Miss Snevellicci's modest double-knock was answered by a foot-boy, who, in reply to her inquiry whether Mrs. Curdle was at home, opened his eyes very wide, grinned very much, and said he didn't know, but he'd inquire. With this, he showed them into a parlour where he kept them waiting, until the two women-servants had repaired thither, under false pretences, to see the play-actors; and having compared notes with them in the passage, and joined in a vast quantity of whispering and giggling, he at length went upstairs with Miss Snevellicci's name.

Now, Mrs. Curdle was supposed, by those who were best informed on such points, to possess quite the London taste in matters relating to literature and the drama; and as to Mr. Curdle, he had written a pamphlet of sixty-four pages, post octavo, on the character of the Nurse's deceased husband in Romeo and Juliet, with an inquiry whether he really had been a "merry man" in his lifetime, or whether it was merely his widow's affectionate partiality that induced her so to report him. He had likewise proved, that by altering the received mode of punctuation, any one of Shakespeare's plays could be made quite different, and the sense completely changed; it is needless to say, therefore, that he was a great critic, and a very profound and most original thinker.

Digitized by Google

"Well, Miss Snevellicci," said Mrs. Curdle, entering the parlour, "and how do *you* do?"

Miss Snevellicci made a graceful obeisance, and hoped Mrs. Curdle was well, as also Mr. Curdle, who at the same time appeared. Mrs. Curdle was dressed in a morning wrapper, with a little cap stuck upon the top of her head. Mr. Curdle wore a loose robe on his back, and his right fore-finger on his forehead after the portraits of Sterne, to whom somebody or other had once said he bore a striking resemblance.

"I ventured to call, for the purpose of asking whether you would put your name to my bespeak, ma'am," said Miss Snevellicci, producing documents.

"Oh! I really don't know what to say," replied Mrs. Curdle. "It's not as if the theatre was in its high and palmy days—you needn't stand, Miss Snevellicci—the drama is gone, perfectly gone."

"As an exquisite embodiment of the poet's visions and a realization of human intellectuality, gilding with refulgent light our dreamy moments, and laying open a new and magic world before the mental eye, the drama is gone, perfectly gone," said Mr. Curdle.

"What man is there, now living, who can present before us all those changing and prismatic colours with which the character of Hamlet is invested?" exclaimed Mrs. Curdle.

"What man indeed—upon the stage," said Mr. Curdle, with a small reservation in favour of himself. "Hamlet! Pooh! ridiculous! Hamlet is gone, perfectly gone."

Quite overcome by these dismal reflections, Mr. and Mrs. Curdle sighed, and sat for some short time without speaking. At length, the lady, turning to Miss Snevellicci, inquired what play she proposed to have.

"Quite a new one," said Miss Snevellicci, "of which this gentleman is the author, and in which he plays; being his

Digitized by Google

first appearance on any stage. Mr. Johnson is the gentleman's name."

"I hope you have preserved the unities, sir?" said Mr. Curdle.

"The original piece is a French one," said Nicholas. "There is abundance of incident, sprightly dialogue, strongly-marked character——"

"—All unavailing without a strict observance of the unities, sir," returned Mr. Curdle. "The unities of the drama, before everything."

"Might I ask you," said Nicholas, hesitating between the respect he ought to assume, and his love of the whimsical, "might I ask you what the unities are?"

Mr. Curdle coughed and considered. "The unities, sir," he said, "are a completeness—a kind of a universal dovetailedness with regard to place and time—a sort of a general oneness, if I may be allowed to use so strong an expression. I take those to be the dramatic unities, so far as I have been enabled to bestow attention upon them, and I have read much upon the subject, and thought much. I find, running through the performances of this child," said Mr. Curdle, turning to the phenomenon, "a unity of feeling, a breadth, a light and shade, a warmth of colouring, a tone, a harmony, a glow, an artistical development of original conceptions, which I look for, in vain, among older performers. I don't know whether I make myself understood?"

"Perfectly," replied Nicholas.

"Just so," said Mr. Curdle, pulling up his neckcloth. "That is my definition of the unities of the drama."

Mrs. Curdle had sat listening to this lucid explanation with great complacency. It being finished, she inquired what Mr. Curdle thought, about putting down their names.

"I don't know, my dear; upon my word I don't know," said Mr. Curdle. "If we do, it must be distinctly under-

Digitized by Google

stood that we do not pledge ourselves to the quality of the performances. Let it go forth to the world, that we do not give *them* the sanction of our names, but that we confer the distinction merely upon Miss Snevellicci. That being clearly stated, I take it to be, as it were, a duty, that we should extend our patronage to a degraded stage, even for the sake of the associations with which it is entwined. Have you got two-and-sixpence for half-a-crown, Miss Snevellicci?" said Mr. Curdle, turning over four of those pieces of money.

Miss Snevellicci felt in all the corners of the pink reticule, but there was nothing in any of them. Nicholas murmured a jest about his being an author, and thought it best not to go through the form of feeling in his own pockets at all.

"Let me see," said Mr. Curdle; "twice four's eight—four shillings a-piece to the boxes, Miss Snevellicci, is exceedingly dear in the present state of drama—three half-crowns is seven-and-six; we shall not differ about sixpence, I suppose? Sixpence will not part us, Miss Snevellicci?"

Poor Miss Snevellicci took the three half-crowns, with many smiles and bends, and Mrs. Curdle, adding several supplementary directions relative to keeping the places for them, and dusting the seat, and sending two clean bills as soon as they came out, rang the bell, as a signal for breaking up the conference.

"Odd people those," said Nicholas, when they got clear of the house.

"I assure you," said Miss Snevellicci, taking his arm, "that I think myself very lucky they did not owe all the money instead of being sixpence short. Now, if you were to succeed, they would give people to understand that they had always patronised you; and if you were to fail, they would have been quite certain of that from the very beginning."

At the next house they visited they were in great glory;

Digitized by Google

for, there, resided the six children who were so enraptured with the public actions of the phenomenon, and who, being called down from the nursery to be treated with a private view of that young lady, proceeded to poke their fingers into her eyes, and tread upon her toes, and show her many other little attentions peculiar to their time of life.

"I shall certainly persuade Mr. Borum to take a private box," said the lady of the house, after a most gracious reception. "I shall only take two of the children, and will make up the rest of the party, of gentlemen—your admirers, Miss Snevellicci. Augustus, you naughty boy, leave the little girl alone."

This was addressed to a young gentleman who was pinching the phenomenon behind, apparently with a view of ascertaining whether she was real.

"I am sure you must be very tired," said the mama, turning to Miss Snevellicci. "I cannot think of allowing you to go, without first taking a glass of wine. Fie, Charlotte, I am ashamed of you! Miss Lane, my dear, pray see to the children."

Miss Lane was the governess, and this entreaty was rendered necessary by the abrupt behaviour of the youngest Miss Borum, who, having filched the phenomenon's little green parasol, was now carrying it bodily off, while the distracted infant looked helplessly on.

"I am sure, where you ever learnt to act as you do," said good-natured Mrs. Borum, turning again to Miss Snevellicci, "I cannot understand (Emma, don't stare so); laughing in one piece, and crying in the next, and so natural in all —oh, dear!"

"I am very happy to hear you express so favourable an opinion." said Miss Snevellicci. "It's quite delightful to think you like it."

"Like it!" cried Mrs. Borum. "Who can help liking it! I would go to the play, twice a week if I could: I dote upon

Digitized by Google

it. Only you're too affecting sometimes. You do put me in such a state; into such fits of crying! Goodness gracious me, Miss Lane, how can you let them torment that poor child so!"

The phenomenon was really in a fair way of being torn limb from limb; for two strong little boys, one holding on by each of her hands were dragging her in different directions as a trial of strength. However, Miss Lane (who had herself been too much occupied in contemplating the grown-up actors, to pay the necessary attention to these proceedings) rescued the unhappy infant at this juncture, who, being recruited with a glass of wine, was shortly afterwards taken away by her friends, after sustaining no more serious damage than a flattening of the pink gauze bonnet, and a rather extensive creasing of the white frock and trousers.

It was a trying morning; for there were a great many calls to make, and everybody wanted a different thing. Some wanted tragedies, and others comedies; some objected to dancing; some wanted scarcely anything else. Some thought the comic singer decidedly low, and others hoped he would have more to do than he usually had. Some people wouldn't promise to go, because other people wouldn't promise to go; and other people wouldn't go at all, because other people went. At length, and by little and little, omitting something in this place, and adding something in that, Miss Snevellicci pledged herself to a bill of fare which was comprehensive enough, if it had no other merit (it included among other trifles, four pieces, divers songs, a few combats, and several dances); and they returned home, pretty well exhausted with the business of the day.

Nicholas worked away at the piece, which was speedily put into rehearsal, and then worked away at his own part, which he studied with great perseverance and acted—as the whole company said—to perfection. And at length the great day arrived. The crier was sent round, in the morn-

Digitized by Google

ing, to proclaim the entertainments with sound of bells in all the thoroughfares; and extra bills of three feet long by nine inches wide, were dispersed in all directions, flung down all the areas, thrust under all the knockers, and developed in all the shops. They were placarded on all the walls too, though not with complete success, for an illiterate person having undertaken this office during the indisposition of the regular bill-sticker, a part were posted sideways, and the remainder upside down.

At half-past five, there was a rush of four people to the gallery-door; at a quarter before six, there were at least a dozen; at six o'clock the kicks were terrific; and when the elder Master Crummles opened the door, he was obliged to run behind it for his life. Fifteen shillings were taken by Mrs. Grudden in the first ten minutes.

Behind the scenes, the same unwonted excitement prevailed. Miss Snevellicci was in such a perspiration that the paint would scarcely stay on her face. Mrs. Crummles was so nervous that she could hardly remember her part. Miss Bravassa's ringlets came out of curl with the heat and anxiety; even Mr. Crummles himself kept peeping through the hole in the curtain, and running back, every now and then, to announce that another man had come into the pit.

At last, the orchestra left off, and the curtain rose upon the new piece. The first scene, in which there was nobody particular, passed off calmly enough, but when Miss Snevellicci went on in the second, accompanied by the phenomenon as child, what a roar of applause broke out! The people in the Borum box rose as one man, waving their hats and handkerchiefs, and uttering shouts of "Bravo!" Mrs. Borum and the governess cast wreaths upon the stage, of which, some fluttered into the lamps, and one crowned the temples of a fat gentleman in the pit, who, looking eagerly towards the scene, remained unconscious of the honour; the tailor and his family kicked at the panels of the upper boxes

Digitized by Google

till they threatened to come out altogether; the very ginger-beer boy remained transfixed in the centre of the house; a young officer, supposed to entertain a passion for Miss Snevellicci, stuck his glass in his eye as though to hide a tear. Again and again Miss Snevellicci curtseyed lower and lower, and again and again the applause came down, louder and louder. At length, when the phenomenon picked up one of the smoking wreaths and put it on, sideways, over Miss Snevellicci's eye, it reached its climax, and the play proceeded.

But when Nicholas came on for his crack scene with Mrs. Crummles, what a clapping of hands there was! When Mrs. Crummles (who was his unworthy mother) sneered, and called him "presumptuous boy," and he defied her, what a tumult of applause came on! When he quarrelled with the other gentleman about the young lady, and producing a case of pistols, said, that if he *was* a gentleman, he would fight him in that drawing-room, until the furniture was sprinkled with the blood of one, if not of two—how boxes, pit, and gallery, joined in one most vigorous cheer! When he called his mother names, because she wouldn't give up the young lady's property, and she relenting, caused him to relent likewise, and fall down on one knee and ask her blessing, how the ladies in the audience sobbed! When he was hid behind the curtain in the dark, and the wicked relation poked a sharp sword in every direction, save where his legs were plainly visible, what a thrill of anxious fear ran through the house! His air, his figure, his walk, his look, everything he said or did, was the subject of commendation. There was a round of applause every time he spoke. And when, at last, in the pump-and-tub scene, Mrs. Grudden lighted the blue fire, and all the unemployed members of the company came in, and tumbled down in various directions—not because that had anything to do with the plot, but in order to finish off with a tableau—the

Digitized by Google

audience (who had by this time increased considerably) gave vent to such a shout of enthusiasm, as had not been heard in those walls for many and many a day.

In short, the success both of new piece and new actor was complete, and when Miss Snevellicci was called for at the end of the play, Nicholas led her on and divided the applause.

3.—CONCERNING A YOUNG LADY FROM LONDON, WHO JOINS THE COMPANY, AND AN ELDERLY ADMIRER WHO FOLLOWS IN HER TRAIN; WITH AN AFFECTING CEREMONY CONSEQUENT ON THEIR ARRIVAL

The new piece being a decided hit, was announced for every evening of performance until further notice, and the evenings when the theatre was closed, were reduced from three in the week to two. Nor were these the only tokens of extraordinary success; for, on the succeeding Saturday, Nicholas received, by favour of the indefatigable Mrs. Grudden, no less a sum than thirty shillings; besides which substantial reward, he enjoyed considerable fame and honour: having a presentation copy of Mr. Curdle's pamphlet forwarded to the theatre, with that gentleman's own autograph (in itself an inestimable treasure) on the fly-leaf, accompanied with a note containing many expressions of approval, and unsolicited assurance that Mr. Curdle would be very happy to read Shakespeare to him for three hours every morning before breakfast during his stay in the town.

"I've got another novelty, Johnson," said Mr. Crummles one morning in great glee.

"What's that?" rejoined Nicholas. "The pony?"

"No, no, we never come to the pony till everything else has failed," said Mr. Crummles. "I don't think we shall come to the pony at all, this season. No, no, not the pony."

"A boy phenomenon, perhaps?" suggested Nicholas.

Digitized by Google

"There is only one phenomenon, sir," replied Mr. Crummles impressively, "and that's a girl."

"Very true," said Nicholas. "I beg your pardon. Then I don't know what it is, I am sure."

"What should you say to a young lady from London?" inquired Mr. Crummles. "Miss So-and-so, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane?"

"I should say she would look very well in the bills," said Nicholas.

"You're about right there," said Mr. Crummles; "and if you had said she would look very well upon the stage too, you wouldn't have been far out. Look here; what do you think of this?"

With this inquiry Mr. Crummles unfolded a red poster, and a blue poster, and a yellow poster, at the top of each of which public notification was inscribed in enormous characters "First appearance of the unrivalled Miss Petowker of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane!"

"Dear me!" said Nicholas, "I know that lady."

"Then you are acquainted with as much talent as was ever compressed into one young person's body," retorted Mr. Crummles, rolling up the bills again; "that is, talent of a certain sort—of a certain sort. 'The Blood Drinker,'" added Mr. Crummles with a prophetic sigh, "'The Blood Drinker' will die with that girl; and she's the only sylph *I* ever saw, who could stand upon one leg, and play the tambourine on her other knee, *like* a sylph."

"When does she come down," asked Nicholas.

"We expect her to-day," replied Mr. Crummles. "She is an old friend of Mrs. Crummles's. Mrs. Crummles saw what she could do—always knew it from the first. She taught her, indeed, nearly all she knows. Mrs. Crummles was the original Blood Drinker."

"Was she, indeed?"

"Yes. She was obliged to give it up though."

Digitized by Google

"Did it disagree with her?" asked Nicholas.

"Not so much with her, as with her audiences," replied Mr. Crummles. "Nobody could stand it. It was too tremendous. You don't quite know what Mrs. Crummles is, yet."

Nicholas ventured to insinuate that he thought he did.

"No, no, you don't," said Mr. Crummles; "you don't, indeed. *I* don't, and that's a fact. I don't think her country will, till she is dead. Some new proof of talent bursts from that astonishing woman every year of her life. Look at her, mother of six children, three of 'em alive, and all upon the stage!"

"Extraordinary!" cried Nicholas.

"Ah! extraordinary indeed," rejoined Mr. Crummles, taking a complacent pinch of snuff, and shaking his head gravely. "I pledge you my professional word I didn't even know she could dance, till her last benefit, and then she played Juliet, and Helen Macgregor, and did the skipping-rope hornpipe between the pieces. The very first time I saw that admirable woman, Johnson," said Mr. Crummles, drawing a little nearer, and speaking in the tone of confidential friendship, "she stood upon her head on the butt-end of a spear, surrounded with blazing fireworks."

"You astonish me!" said Nicholas.

"*She* astonished *me!*" returned Mr. Crummles, with a very serious countenance. "Such grace, coupled with such dignity! I adored her from that moment!"

The arrival of the gifted subject of these remarks put an abrupt termination to Mr. Crummles's eulogium. Almost immediately afterwards, Master Percy Crummles entered with a letter, which had arrived by the General Post, and was directed to his gracious mother; at sight of the superscription whereof, Mrs. Crummles exclaimed, "From Henrietta Petowker, I do declare!" and instantly became absorbed in the contents.

Digitized by Google

"Is it——?" inquired Mr. Crummles, hesitating

"Oh, yes, it's all right," replied Mrs. Crummles, anticipating the question. "What an excellent thing for her, to be sure!"

"It's the best thing altogether, that I ever heard of, I think," said Mr. Crummles; and then Mr. Crummles, Mrs. Crummles, and Master Percy Crummles, all fell to laughing violently. Nicholas left them to enjoy their mirth together, and walked to his lodgings: wondering very much what mystery connected with Miss Petowker could provoke such merriment, and pondering still more on the extreme surprise with which that lady would regard his sudden enlistment in a profession of which she was such a distinguished and brilliant ornament.

But in this latter respect he was mistaken; for—whether Mr. Vincent Crummles had paved the way or Miss Petowker had some special reason for treating him with even more than her usual amiability—their meeting at the theatre next day was more like that of two dear friends who had been inseparable from infancy, than a recognition passing between a lady and gentleman who had only met some half dozen times, and then by mere chance. Nay, Miss Petowker even whispered that she had wholly dropped the Kenwigses in her conversations with the manager's family, and had represented herself as having encountered Mr. Johnson in the very first and most fashionable circles; and on Nicholas receiving this intelligence with unfeigned surprise, she added, with a sweet glance, that she had a claim on his good nature now, and might tax it before long.

Nicholas had the honour of playing in a slight piece with Miss Petowker that night, and could not but observe that the warmth of her reception was mainly attributable to a most persevering umbrella in the upper boxes; he saw, too, that the enchanting actress cast many sweet looks

Digitized by Google

towards the quarter whence these sounds proceeded; and that every time she did so, the umbrella broke out afresh. Once, he thought that a peculiarly shaped hat in the same corner was not wholly unknown to him; but, being occupied with his share of the stage business, he bestowed no great attention upon this circumstance, and it had quite vanished from his memory by the time he reached home.

He had just sat down to supper with Smike, when one of the people of the house came outside the door, and announced that a gentleman below stairs wished to speak to Mr. Johnson.

"Well, if he does, you must tell him to come up; that's all I know," replied Nicholas. "One of our hungry brethren, I suppose, Smike."

His fellow-lodger looked at the cold meat in silent calculation of the quantity that would be left for dinner next day, and put back a slice he had cut for himself, in order that the visitor's encroachments might be less formidable in their effects.

"It is not anybody who has been here before," said Nicholas, "for he is tumbling up every stair. Come in, come in. In the name of wonder! Mr. Lillyvick?"

It was, indeed, the collector of water-rates who, regarding Nicholas, with a fixed look and immovable countenance, shook hands with most portentous solemnity, and sat himself down in a seat by the chimney-corner.

"Why, when did you come here?" asked Nicholas.

"This morning, sir," replied Mr. Lillyvick.

"Oh! I see; then you were at the theatre to-night, and it was your umb——"

"This umbrella," said Mr. Lillyvick, producing a fat green cotton one with a battered ferrule. "What did you think of that performance?"

"So far as I could judge, being on the stage," replied Nicholas, "I thought it very agreeable."

Digitized by Google

"Agreeable!" cried the collector. "I mean to say, sir, that it was delicious."

Mr. Lillyvick bent forward to pronounce the last word with greater emphasis; and having done so, drew himself up, and frowned and nodded a great many times.

"I say, delicious," repeated Mr. Lillyvick. "Absorbing, fairy-like, toomultuous," and again Mr. Lillyvick drew himself up, and again he frowned and nodded.

"Ah!" said Nicholas, a little surprised at these symptoms of ecstatic approbation. "Yes, she is a clever girl."

"She is a divinity," returned Mr. Lillyvick, giving a collector's double knock on the ground with the umbrella before-mentioned. "I have known divine actresses before now, sir; I used to collect—at least I used to *call for*—and very often call for—the water-rate at the house of a divine actress, who lived in my beat for upwards of four years, but never—no, never, sir—of all divine creatures, actresses or no actresses, did I see a diviner one than is Henrietta Petowker."

Nicholas had much ado to prevent himself from laughing; not trusting himself to speak, he merely nodded in accordance with Mr. Lillyvick's nods, and remained silent.

"Let me speak a word with you in private," said Mr. Lillyvick.

Nicholas looked good-humouredly at Smike, who, taking the hint, disappeared.

"A bachelor is a miserable wretch, sir," said Mr. Lillyvick.

"Is he?" asked Nicholas.

"He is," rejoined the collector. "I have lived in the world for nigh sixty year, and I ought to know what it is."

"You *ought* to know, certainly," thought Nicholas; "but whether you do or not, is another question."

"If a bachelor happens to have saved a little matter of

Digitized by Google

money," said Mr. Lillyvick, "his sisters and brothers, and nephews and nieces, look *to* that money, and not to him; even if, by being a public character, he is the head of the family, or, as it may be, the main from which all the other little branches are turned on, they still wish him dead all the while, and get low-spirited every time they see him looking in good health, because they want to come into his little property. You see that?"

"Oh, yes," replied Nicholas: "it's very true, no doubt."

"The great reason for not being married," resumed Mr. Lillyvick, "is the expense; that's what's kept me off, or else—Lord!" said Mr. Lillyvick, snapping his fingers, "I might have had fifty women."

"Fine women?" asked Nicholas.

"Fine women, sir!" replied the collector; "aye! not so fine as Henrietta Petowker, for she is an uncommon specimen, but such women as don't fall into every man's way, I can tell you. Now suppose a man can get a fortune *in* a wife instead of with her—eh?"

"Why, then, he's a lucky fellow," replied Nicholas.

"That's what I say," retorted the collector, patting him benignantly on the side of the head with his umbrella; "just what I say. Henrietta Petowker, the talented Henrietta Petowker, has a fortune in herself, and I am going to——"

"To make her Mrs. Lillyvick?" suggested Nicholas.

"No, sir, not to make her Mrs. Lillyvick," replied the collector. "Actresses, sir, always keep their maiden names —that's the regular thing—but I'm going to marry her; and the day after to-morrow, too."

"I congratulate you, sir," said Nicholas.

"Thank you, sir," replied the collector, buttoning his waistcoat. "I shall draw her salary, of course, and I hope after all that it's nearly as cheap to keep two as it is to keep one; that's a consolation."

Digitized by Google

"Surely you don't want any consolation at such a moment?" observed Nicholas.

"No," replied Mr. Lillyvick, shaking his head nervously: "no—of course not."

"But how come you both here, if you're going to be married, Mr. Lillyvick?" asked Nicholas.

"Why, that's what I came to explain to you," replied the collector of water-rates. "The fact is, we have thought it best to keep it secret from the family."

"Family!" said Nicholas. "What family?"

"The Kenwigses of course," rejoined Mr. Lillyvick. "If my niece and the children had known a word about it before I came away, they'd have gone into fits at my feet, and never have come out of 'em till I took an oath not to marry anybody. Or they'd have got out a commission of lunacy, or some dreadful thing," said the collector, quite trembling as he spoke.

"To be sure," said Nicholas. "Yes; they would have been jealous, no doubt."

"To prevent which," said Mr. Lillyvick, "Henrietta Petowker (it was settled between us) should come down here to her friends, the Crummleses, under pretence of this engagement and I should go down to Guildford the day before, and join her on the coach there; which I did, and we came down from Guildford yesterday together. Now, for fear you should be writing to Mr. Noggs, and might say anything about us we have thought it best to let you into the secret. We shall be married from the Crummleses' lodgings, and shall be delighted to see you—either before church or at breakfast-time, which you like. It won't be expensive, you know," said the collector, highly anxious to prevent any misunderstanding on this point; "just muffins and coffee, with perhaps a shrimp or something of that sort for a relish, you know."

"Yes, yes, I understand," replied Nicholas. "Oh, I shall

Digitized by Google

be most happy to come; it will give me the greatest pleasure. Where's the lady stopping? With Mrs. Crummles?"

"Why, no," said the collector; "they couldn't very well dispose of her at night, and so she is staying with an acquaintance of hers, and another young lady; they both belong to the theatre."

"Miss Snevellicci, I suppose?" said Nicholas.

"Yes, that's the name."

"And they'll be bridesmaids, I presume?" said Nicholas.

"Why," said the collector, with a rueful face, "they *will* have four bridesmaids; I'm afraid they'll make it rather theatrical."

"Oh no, not at all," replied Nicholas, with an awkward attempt to convert a laugh into a cough. "Who may the four be? Miss Snevellicci of course—Miss Ledrook——"

"The—the phenomenon," groaned the collector.

"Ha, ha!" cried Nicholas. "I beg your pardon, I don't know what I'm laughing at—yes, that'll be very pretty—the phenomenon—who else?"

"Some young woman or other," replied the collector, rising; "some other friend of Henrietta Petowker's. Well, you'll be careful not to say anything about it, will you?"

"You may safely depend upon me," replied Nicholas. "Won't you take anything to eat or drink?"

"No," said the collector; "I haven't any appetite. I should think it was a very pleasant life, the married one, eh?"

"I have not the least doubt of it," rejoined Nicholas.

"Yes," said the collector; "certainly. Oh yes. No doubt. Good night."

With these words, Mr. Lillyvick, whose manner had exhibited through the whole of this interview a most extraordinary compound of precipitation, hesitation, confidence and doubt, fondness, misgiving, meanness, and self-importance, turned his back upon the room, and left Nicholas to enjoy a laugh by himself if he felt so disposed.

Digitized by Google

Without stopping to inquire whether the intervening day appeared to Nicholas to consist of the usual number of hours of the ordinary length, it may be remarked that, to the parties more directly interested in the forthcoming ceremony, it passed with great rapidity, insomuch that when Miss Petowker awoke on the succeeding morning in the chamber of Miss Snevellicci, she declared that nothing should ever persuade her that that really was the day which was to behold a change in her condition.

"I never will believe it," said Miss Petowker; "I cannot really. It's of no use talking, I never can make up my mind to go through with such a trial!"

On hearing this, Miss Snevellicci, and Miss Ledrook, who knew perfectly well that their fair friend's mind had been made up for three or four years, at any period of which time she would have cheerfully undergone the desperate trial now approaching if she could have found any eligible gentleman disposed for the venture, began to preach comfort and firmness, and to say how very proud she ought to feel that it was in her power to confer lasting bliss on a deserving object, and how necessary it was for the happiness of mankind in general that women should possess fortitude and resignation on such occasions; and that although for their parts they held true happiness to consist in a single life, which they would not willingly exchange—no, not for any worldly consideration—still (thank Heaven), if ever the time *should* come, they hoped they knew their duty too well to repine, but would the rather submit with meekness and humility of spirit to a fate for which Providence had clearly designed them with a view to the contentment and reward of their fellow-creatures.

"I might feel it was a great blow," said Miss Snevellicci, "to break up old associations and what-do-you-callems of that kind, but I would submit, my dear, I would indeed."

"So would I," said Miss Ledrook; "I would rather court

Digitized by Google

the yoke than shun it. I have broken hearts before now, and I'm very sorry for it. It's a terrible thing to reflect upon."

"It is indeed," said Miss Snevellicci. "Now Led, my dear, we must positively get her ready, or we shall be too late, we shall indeed."

This pious reasoning, and perhaps the fear of being too late, supported the bride through the ceremony of robing, after which, strong tea and brandy were administered in alternate doses as a means of strengthening her feeble limbs and causing her to walk steadier.

"How do you feel now, my love?" inquired Miss Snevellicci.

"Oh Lillyvick!" cried the bride. "If you knew what I am undergoing for you!"

"Of course he knows it, love, and will never forget it," said Miss Ledrook.

"Do you think he won't?" cried Miss Petowker, really showing great capability for the stage. "Oh, do you think he won't? Do you think Lillyvick will always remember it —always, always, always?"

There is no knowing in what this burst of feeling might have ended, if Miss Snevellicci had not at that moment proclaimed the arrival of the fly, which so astounded the bride that she shook off divers alarming symptoms which were coming on very strong, and running to the glass adjusted her dress, and calmly declared that she was ready for the sacrifice.

She was accordingly supported into the coach and there "kept up" (as Miss Snevellicci said) with perpetual sniffs of *sal volatile* and sips of brandy and other gentle stimulants, until they reached the manager's door, which was already opened by the two Master Crummleses, who wore white cockades, and were decorated with the choicest and most resplendent waistcoats in the theatrical wardrobe. By the

Digitized by Google

combined exertions of these young gentlemen and the bridesmaids, assisted by the coachman, Miss Petowker was at length supported in a condition of much exhaustion to the first floor, where she no sooner encountered the youthful bridegroom than she fainted with great decorum.

"Henrietta Petowker!" said the collector; "cheer up, my lovely one."

Miss Petowker grasped the collector's hand, but emotion choked her utterance.

"Is the sight of me so dreadful, Henrietta Petowker?" said the collector.

"Oh no, no, no" rejoined the bride; "but all the friends, the darling friends, of my youthful days—to leave them all —it is such a shock!"

With such expressions of sorrow, Miss Petowker went on to enumerate the dear friends of her youthful days one by one, and to call upon such of them as were present to come and embrace her. This done, she remembered that Mrs. Crummles had been more than a mother to her, and after that, that Mr. Crummles had been more than a father to her, and after that, that the Master Crummleses and Miss Ninetta Crummles had been more than brothers and sisters to her. These various remembrances being each accompanied with a series of hugs, occupied a long time, and they were obliged to drive to church very fast, for fear they should be too late.

The procession consisted of two flys; in the first of which were Miss Bravassa (the fourth bridesmaid), Mrs. Crummles, the collector, and Mr. Folair, who had been chosen as his second on the occasion. In the other were the bride, Mr. Crummles, Miss Snevellicci, Miss Ledrook, and the phenomenon. The costumes were beautiful. The bridesmaids were quite covered with artificial flowers, and the phenomenon, in particular, was rendered almost invisible by the portable arbour in which she was enshrined. Miss Ledrook,

Digitized by Google

who was of a romantic turn, wore in her breast the miniature of some field-officer unknown, which she had purchased, a great bargain, not very long before; the other ladies displayed several dazzling articles of imitative jewellery, almost equal to real; and Mrs. Crummles came out in a stern and gloomy majesty, which attracted the admiration of all beholders.

But, perhaps the appearance of Mr. Crummles was more striking and appropriate than that of any member of the party. This gentleman, who personated the bride's father, had, in pursuance of a happy and original conception, "made up" for the part by arraying himself in a theatrical wig, of a style and pattern commonly known as a brown George, and moreover assuming a snuff-coloured suit, of the previous century, with grey silk stockings, and buckles to his shoes. The better to support his assumed character he had determined to be greatly overcome, and, consequently, when they entered the church, the sobs of the affectionate parent were so heartrending that the pew-opener suggested the propriety of his retiring to the vestry, and comforting himself with a glass of water before the ceremony began.

The procession up the aisle was beautiful. The bride, with the four bridesmaids, forming a group previously arranged and rehearsed; the collector, followed by his second, imitating his walk and gestures, to the indescribable amusement of some theatrical friends in the gallery; Mr. Crummles, with an infirm and feeble gait; Mrs. Crummles advancing with that stage walk, which consists of a stride and a stop alternately; it was the completest thing ever witnessed. The ceremony was very quickly disposed of, and all parties present having signed the register (for which purpose, when it came to his turn, Mr. Crummles carefully wiped and put on an immense pair of spectacles), they went back to breakfast in high spirits. And here they found Nicholas awaiting their arrival.

Digitized by Google

"Now then," said Crummles, who had been assisting Mrs. Grudden in the preparations, which were on a more extensive scale than was quite agreeable to the collector. "Breakfast, breakfast."

No second invitation was required. The company crowded and squeezed themselves at the table as well as they could, and fell to, immediately: Miss Petowker blushing very much when anybody was looking and eating very much when anybody was *not* looking; and Mr. Lillyvick going to work as though with the cool resolve, that since the good things must be paid for by him, he would leave as little as possible for the Crummleses to eat up afterwards.

"It's very soon done, sir, isn't it?" inquired Mr. Folair of the collector, leaning over the table to address him.

"What is soon done, sir?" returned Mr. Lillyvick.

"The tying up, the fixing oneself with a wife," replied Mr. Folair. "It don't take long, does it?"

"No, sir," replied Mr. Lillyvick, colouring. "It does not take long. And what then, sir?"

"Oh! nothing," said the actor. "It don't take a man long to hang himself, either, eh? Ha, ha!"

Mr. Lillyvick laid down his knife and fork and looked round the table with indignant astonishment.

"To hang himself!" repeated Mr. Lillyvick.

A profound silence came upon all, for Mr. Lillyvick was dignified beyond expression.

"To hang himself!" cried Mr. Lillyvick again. "Is any parallel attempted to be drawn in this company between matrimony and hanging?"

"The noose, you know," said Mr. Folair, a little crestfallen.

"The noose, sir?" retorted Mr. Lillyvick. "Does any man dare to speak to me of a noose, and Henrietta Pe——"

"Lillyvick," suggested Mr. Crummles.

"—and Henrietta Lillyvick in the same breath?" said

Digitized by Google

the collector. "In this house, in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Crummles, who have brought up a talented and virtuous family, to be blessings and phenomenons, and what not, are we to hear talk of nooses?"

"Folair," said Mr. Crummles, deeming it a matter of decency to be affected by this allusion to himself and partner, "I'm astonished at you."

"What are you going on in this way at me for?" urged the unfortunate actor. "What have I done?"

"Done, sir!" cried Mr. Lillyvick, "aimed a blow at the whole framework of society——"

"And the best and tenderest feelings," added Crummles, relapsing into the old man.

"And the highest and most estimable of social ties," said the collector. "Noose! As if one was caught, trapped into the married state, pinned by the leg, instead of going into it of one's own accord and glorying in the act!"

"I didn't mean to make it out, that you were caught and trapped, and pinned by the leg," replied the actor. "I'm sorry for it; I can't say any more."

"So you ought to be, sir," returned Mr. Lillyvick; "and I am glad to hear that you have enough of feeling left to be so."

The quarrel appearing to terminate with this reply, Mrs. Lillyvick considered that the fittest occasion (the attention of the company being no longer distracted) to burst into tears, and require the assistance of all four bridesmaids, which was immediately rendered, though not without some confusion, for the room being small and the table-cloth long, a whole detachment of plates were swept off the board at the very first move. Regardless of this circumstance, however, Mrs. Lillyvick refused to be comforted until the belligerents had passed their words that the dispute should be carried no further, which, after a sufficient show of reluctance, they did, and from that time Mr. Folair sat in moody silence,

Digitized by Google

contenting himself with pinching Nicholas's leg when anything was said, and so expressing his contempt both for the speaker and the sentiments to which he gave utterance.

There were a great number of speeches made; some by Nicholas, and some by Crummles, and some by the collector; two by the Master Crummleses in returning thanks for themselves, and one by the phenomenon on behalf of the bridesmaids, at which Mrs. Crummles shed tears. There was some singing, too, from Miss Ledrook and Miss Bravassa, and very likely there might have been more, if the fly-driver, who stopped to drive the happy pair to the spot where they proposed to take steamboat to Ryde, had not sent in a peremptory message intimating, that if they didn't come directly he should infallibly demand eighteenpence over and above his agreement.

This desperate threat effectually broke up the party. After a most pathetic leave-taking, Mr. Lillyvick and his bride departed for Ryde where they were to spend the next two days in profound retirement, and whither they were accompanied by the infant, who had been appointed travelling bridesmaid on Mr. Lillyvick's express stipulation: as the steamboat people, deceived by her size, would (he had previously ascertained) transport her at half-price.

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF NICHOLAS, AND CERTAIN INTERNAL DIVISIONS IN THE COMPANY OF MR. VINCENT CRUMMLES

The unexpected success and favour with which his experiment at Portsmouth had been received, induced Mr. Crummles to prolong his stay in that town for a fortnight beyond the period he had originally assigned for the duration of his visit, during which time Nicholas personated a vast variety of characters with undiminished success and attracted so many people to the theatre who had never been seen there before, that a benefit was considered by the

Digitized by Google

manager a very promising speculation. Nicholas assenting to the terms proposed, the benefit was had, and by it he realized no less a sum than twenty pounds.

"You are out of spirits," said Smike, on the following night.

"Not I!" rejoined Nicholas, with assumed gaiety, for the confession would have made the boy miserable all night; "I was thinking about my sister, Smike."

"Sister!"

"Aye."

"Is she like you?" inquired Smike.

"Why, so they say," replied Nicholas, laughing, "only a great deal handsomer."

"She must be *very* beautiful," said Smike, after thinking a little while with his hands folded together, and his eyes bent upon his friend.

"Anybody who didn't know you as well as I do, my dear fellow, would say you were an accomplished courtier," said Nicholas.

"I don't even know what that is," replied Smike, shaking his head. "Shall I ever see your sister?"

"To be sure," cried Nicholas; "we shall all be together one of these days—when we are rich, Smike."

"How is it that you, who are so kind and good to me, have nobody to be kind to you?" asked Smike. "I cannot make that out."

"Why, it is a long story," replied Nicholas, "and one you would have some difficulty in comprehending, I fear. I have an enemy—you understand what that is?"

"Oh, yes, I understand that," said Smike.

"Well, it is owing to him," returned Nicholas. "He is rich, and not so easily punished as *your* old enemy, Mr. Squeers. He is my uncle, but he is a villain, and has done me wrong."

"Has he though?" asked Smike, bending eagerly forward. "What is his name? Tell me his name."

Digitized by Google

"Ralph—Ralph Nickleby."

"Ralph Nickleby," repeated Smike. "Ralph. I'll get that name by heart."

He had muttered it over to himself some twenty times, when a loud knock at the door disturbed him from his occupation. Before he could open it, Mr. Folair, the pantomimist, thrust in his head.

Mr. Folair's head was usually decorated with a very round hat, usually high in the crown, and curled up quite tight in the brim. On the present occasion he wore it very much on one side, with the back part forward in consequence of its being the least rusty; round his neck he wore a flaming red worsted comforter, whereof the straggling ends peeped out beneath his threadbare Newmarket coat, which was tight and buttoned all the way up. He carried in his hand one very dirty glove, and a cheap dress cane with a glass handle; in short, his whole appearance was unusually dashing, and demonstrated a far more scrupulous attention to his toilet, than he was in the habit of bestowing upon it.

"Good evening, sir," said Mr. Folair, taking off the tall hat, and running his fingers through his hair. "I bring a communication. Hem!"

"From whom and what about?" inquired Nicholas. "You are unusually mysterious to-night."

"Cold, perhaps," returned Mr. Folair; "cold, perhaps. That is the fault of my position—not of myself, Mr. Johnson. My position as a mutual friend requires it, sir." Mr. Folair paused with a most impressive look, and diving into the hat before noticed, drew from thence a small piece of whity-brown paper curiously folded, whence he brought forth a note which it had served to keep clean, and handing it over to Nicholas, said——

"Have the goodness to read that, sir."

Nicholas, in a state of much amazement, took the note and broke the seal, glancing at Mr. Folair as he did so, who,

Digitized by Google

knitting his brow and pursing up his mouth with great dignity, was sitting with his eyes steadily fixed upon the ceiling.

It was directed to blank Johnson, Esq., by favour of Augustus Folair, Esq., and the astonishment of Nicholas was in no degree lessened, when he found it to be couched in the following laconic terms:—

"Mr. Lenville presents his kind regards to Mr. Johnson, and will feel obliged if he will inform him at what hour to-morrow morning it will be most convenient to him to meet Mr. L. at the Theatre, for the purpose of having his nose pulled in the presence of the company.

"Mr. Lenville requests Mr. Johnson not to neglect making an appointment, as he has invited two or three professional friends to witness the ceremony, and cannot disappoint them upon any account whatever.

"*Portsmouth, Tuesday night.*"

Indignant as he was at this impertinence, there was something so exquisitely absurd in such a cartel of defiance, that Nicholas was obliged to bite his lip and read the note over two or three times before he could muster sufficient gravity and sternness to address the hostile messenger, who had not taken his eyes from the ceiling, nor altered the expression of his face in the slightest degree.

"Do you know the contents of this note, sir?" he asked, at length.

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Folair, looking round for an instant, and immediately carrying his eyes back again to the ceiling.

"And how dare you bring it here, sir?" asked Nicholas, tearing it into very little pieces, and jerking it in a shower towards the messenger. "Had you no fear of being kicked downstairs, sir?"

Mr. Folair turned his head—now ornamented with

Digitized by Google

several fragments of the note—towards Nicholas, and with the same imperturbable dignity, briefly replied, "No."

"Then," said Nicholas, taking up the tall hat and tossing it towards the door, "you had better follow that article of your dress, sir, or you may find youself very disagreeably deceived, and that within a dozen seconds."

"I say, Johnson," remonstrated Mr. Folair, suddenly losing all his dignity, "none of that, you know. No tricks with a gentleman's wardrobe."

"Leave the room," returned Nicholas. "How could you presume to come here on such an errand, you scoundrel?"

"Pooh! pooh!" said Mr. Folair, unwinding his comforter, and gradually getting himself out of it. "There—that's enough."

"Enough!" cried Nicholas, advancing towards him. "Take yourself off, sir."

"Pooh! pooh! I tell you," returned Mr. Folair, waving his hand in deprecation of any further wrath; "I wasn't in earnest. I only brought it in joke."

"You had better be careful how you indulge in such jokes again," said Nicholas, "or you may find an allusion to pulling noses rather a dangerous reminder for the subject of your facetiousness. Was it written in joke, too, pray?"

"No, no, that's the best of it," returned the actor; "right down earnest—honour bright."

Nicholas could not repress a smile at the odd figure before him, which, at all times more calculated to provoke mirth than anger, was especially so at that moment, when with one knee upon the ground, Mr. Folair twirled his old hat round upon his hand, and affected the extremest agony lest any of the nap should have been knocked off—an ornament which it is almost superfluous to say, it had not boasted for many months.

"Come, sir," said Nicholas, laughing in spite of himself. "Have the goodness to explain."

Digitized by Google

"Why, I'll tell you how it is," said Mr. Folair, sitting himself down in a chair with great coolness. "Since you came here Lenville has done nothing but second business, and, instead of having a reception every night as he used to have, they have let him come on as if he was nobody."

"What do you mean by a reception?" asked Nicholas.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Mr. Folair, "what an unsophisticated shepherd you are, Johnson! Why, applause from the house when you first come on. So he has gone on night after night, never getting a hand, and you getting a couple of rounds at least, and sometimes three, till at length he got quite desperate, and had half a mind last night to play Tybalt with a real sword, and pink you—not dangerously, but just enough to lay you up for a month or two."

"Very considerate," remarked Nicholas.

"Yes, I think it was, under the circumstances; his professional reputation being at stake," said Mr. Folair, quite seriously. "But his heart failed him, and he cast about for some other way of annoying you, and making himself popular at the same time—for that's the point. Notoriety, notoriety, is the thing. Bless you, if he had pinked you," said Mr. Folair, stopping to make a calculation in his mind, "it would have been worth—ah, it would have been worth eight to ten shillings a week to him. All the town would have come to see the actor who nearly killed a man by mistake; I shouldn't wonder if it had got him an engagement in London. However, he was obliged to try some other mode of getting popular, and this one occurred to him. It's a clever idea, really. If you had shown the white feather, and let him pull your nose, he'd have got it into the paper; if you had sworn the peace against him, it would have been in the paper too, and he'd have been just as much talked about as you—don't you see?"

"Oh certainly," rejoined Nicholas; "but suppose I were

Digitized by Google

to turn the tables, and pull *his* nose, what then? Would that make his fortune?"

"Why, I don't think it would," replied Mr. Folair, scratching his head, "because there wouldn't be any romance about it, and he wouldn't be favourably known. To tell you the truth though, he didn't calculate much upon that, for you're always so mild spoken, and are so popular among the women, that we didn't suspect you of showing fight. If you did, however, he has a way of getting out of it easily, depend upon that."

"Has he?" rejoined Nicholas. "We will try to-morrow morning. In the meantime, you can give whatever account of our interview you like best. Good night."

As Mr. Folair was pretty well known among his fellow-actors for a man who delighted in mischief, and was by no means scrupulous, Nicholas had not much doubt but that he had secretly prompted the tragedian in the course he had taken, and, moreover, that he would have carried his mission with a very high hand if he had not been disconcerted by the very unexpected demonstrations with which it had been received. It was not worth his while to be serious with him, however, so he dismissed the pantomimist, with a gentle hint that if he offended again it would be under the penalty of a broken head; and Mr. Folair, taking the caution in exceedingly good part, walked away to confer with his principal, and give such an account of his proceedings as he might think best calculated to carry on the joke.

He had no doubt reported that Nicholas was in a state of extreme bodily fear; for when that young gentleman walked with much deliberation down to the theatre next morning at the usual hour, he found all the company assembled in evident expectation, and Mr. Lenville, with his severest stage face, sitting majestically on a table, whistling defiance.

Now the ladies were on the side of Nicholas, and the gentlemen (being jealous) were on the side of the disap-

Digitized by Google

pointed tragedian; so that the latter formed a little group about the redoubtable Mr. Lenville, and the former looked on at a little distance in some trepidation and anxiety. On Nicholas stopping to salute them, Mr. Lenville laughed a scornful laugh, and made some general remark touching the natural history of puppies.

"Oh! said Nicholas, looking quietly round, "are you there?"

"Slave!" returned Mr. Lenville, flourishing his right arm, and approaching Nicholas with a theatrical stride. But somehow he appeared just at that moment a little startled, as if Nicholas did not look quite so frightened as he had expected, and came all at once to an awkward halt, at which the assembled ladies burst into a shrill laugh.

"Object of my scorn and hatred!" said Mr. Lenville, "I hold ye in contempt."

Nicholas laughed in very unexpected enjoyment of this performance; and the ladies, by way of encouragement, laughed louder than before; whereat Mr. Lenville assumed his bitterest smile, and expressed his opinion that they were "minions."

"But they shall not protect ye!" said the tragedian, taking an upward look at Nicholas, beginning at his boots and ending at the crown of his head, and then a downward one, beginning at the crown of his head, and ending at his boots—which two looks, as everybody knows, express defiance on the stage. "They shall not protect ye—boy!"

Thus speaking, Mr. Lenville folded his arms, and treated Nicholas to that expression of face with which, in melodramatic performances, he was in the habit of regarding the tyrannical kings when they said, "Away with him to the deepest dungeon beneath the castle moat;" and which, accompanied with a little jingling of fetters, had been known to produce great effects in its time.

Whether it was absence of the fetters or not, it made

Digitized by Google

no very deep impression on Mr. Lenville's adversary, however, but rather seemed to increase the good humour expressed in his countenance; in which stage of the contest, one or two gentlemen, who had come out expressly to witness the pulling of Nicholas's nose, grew impatient, murmuring that if it were to be done at all it had better be done at once, and that if Mr. Lenville didn't mean to do it he had better say so and not keep them waiting there. Thus urged the tragedian adjusted the cuff of his right coat sleeve for the performance of the operation, and walked in a very stately manner up to Nicholas, who suffered him to approach to within the requisite distance, and then, without the smallest discomposure, knocked him down.

Before the discomfited tragedian could raise his head from the boards, Mrs. Lenville (who, as has been before hinted, was in an interesting state) rushed from the rear rank of ladies, and uttering a piercing scream threw herself upon the body.

"Do you see this, monster? Do you see *this?*" cried Mr. Lenville, sitting up, and pointing to his prostrate lady, who was holding him very tight round the waist.

"Come," said Nicholas, nodding his head, "apologize for the insolent note you wrote to me last night, and waste no more time in talking."

"Never!" cried Mr. Lenville.

"Yes—yes—yes!" screamed his wife. "For my sake—for mine, Lenville—forego all idle forms, unless you would see me a blighted corse at your feet."

"This is affecting!" said Mr. Lenville, looking round him, and drawing the back of his hand across his eyes. "The ties of nature are strong. The weak husband and the father—the father that is yet to be—relents. I apologize."

"Humbly and submissively?" said Nicholas.

"Humbly and submissively," returned the tragedian,

Digitized by Google

scowling upwards. "But only to save her,—for a time will come——"

"Very good," said Nicholas; "I hope Mrs. Lenville may have a good one; and when it does come, and you are a father, you shall retract it if you have the courage. There. Be careful, sir, to what lengths your jealousy carries you another time; and be careful, also, before you venture too far, to ascertain your rival's temper." With this parting advice Nicholas picked up Mr. Lenville's ash stick which had flown out of his hand, and breaking it in half, threw him the pieces and withdrew.

The profoundest deference was paid to Nicholas that night and the people who had been most anxious to have his nose pulled in the morning, embraced occasions of taking him aside, and telling him with great feeling, how very friendly they took it that he should have treated that Lenville so properly, who was a most unbearable fellow, and on whom they had all by a remarkable coincidence at one time or other contemplated the infliction of condign punishment, which they had only been restrained from administering by considerations of mercy; indeed, to judge from the invariable termination of all these stories, there never was such a charitable and kind-hearted set of people as the male members of Mr. Crummles's company.

Nicholas bore his triumph, as he had his success in the little world of the theatre, with the utmost moderation and good humour. The crestfallen Mr. Lenville made an expiring effort to obtain revenge by sending a boy into the gallery to hiss, but he fell a sacrifice to popular indignation, and was promptly turned out without having his money back.

"Well, Smike," said Nicholas when the first piece was over, and he had almost finished dressing to go home, "is there any letter yet?"

"Yes," replied Smike, "I got this one from the post-office."

Digitized by Google

"From Newman Noggs," said Nicholas, casting his eye upon the cramped direction; "it's no easy matter to make his writing out. Let me see—let me see."

By dint of poring over the letter for half an hour, he contrived to make himself master of the contents, which were certainly not of a nature to set his mind at ease. Newman took upon himself to send back the ten pounds, observing that he had ascertained that neither Mrs. Nickleby nor Kate was in actual want of money at the moment, and that a time might shortly come when Nicholas might want it more. He entreated him not to be alarmed at what he was about to say;—there was no bad news—they were in good health—but he thought circumstances might occur, or were occurring, which would render it absolutely necessary that Kate should have her brother's protection, and if so, Newman said, he would write to him to that effect, either by the next post or the next but one.

Nicholas read this passage very often and the more he thought of it the more he began to fear some treachery upon the part of Ralph. Once or twice he felt tempted to repair to London at all hazards without an hour's delay, but a little reflection assured him that if such a step were necessary, Newman would have spoken out and told him so at once.

"At all events I should prepare them here for the possibility of my going away suddenly," said Nicholas; "I should lose no time in doing that." As the thought occurred to him, he took up his hat and hurried to the green-room.

"Well, Mr. Johnson," said Mrs. Crummles, who was seated there in full regal costume, with the phenomenon as the Maiden in her maternal arms, "next week for Ryde, then for Winchester, then for——"

"I have some reason to fear," interrupted Nicholas, "that before you leave here my career with you will have closed."

"Closed!" cried Mrs. Crummles, raising her hands in astonishment.

Digitized by Google

"Closed!" cried Miss Snevellicci, trembling so much in her tights that she actually laid her hand upon the shoulder of the manageress for support.

"Why, he don't mean to say he's going!" exclaimed Mrs. Grudden, making her way towards Mrs. Crummles. "Hoity toity! Nonsense."

The phenomenon, being of an affectionate nature and moreover excitable, raised a loud cry, and Miss Belvawney and Miss Bravassa actually shed tears. Even the male performers stopped in their conversation, and echoed the word "Going!" although some among them (and they had been the loudest in their congratulations that day) winked at each other as though they would not be sorry to lose such a favoured rival; an opinion, indeed, which the honest Mr. Folair, who was ready dressed for the savage, openly stated in so many words to a demon with whom he was sharing a pot of porter.

Nicholas briefly said that he feared it would be so, although he could not yet speak with any degree of certainty; and getting away as soon as he could, went home to con Newman's letter once more, and speculate upon it afresh.

How trifling all that had been occupying his time and thoughts for many weeks seemed to him during that sleepless night, and how constantly and incessantly present to his imagination was the one idea that Kate in the midst of some great trouble and distress might even then be looking —and vainly too—for him!

4.—FESTIVITIES ARE HELD IN HONOUR OF NICHOLAS, WHO SUDDENLY WITHDRAWS HIMSELF FROM THE SOCIETY OF MR. VINCENT CRUMMLES AND HIS THEATRICAL COMPANIONS

Mr. Vincent Crummles was no sooner acquainted with the public announcement which Nicholas had made relative

Digitized by Google

to the probability of his shortly ceasing to be a member of the company, than he evinced many tokens of grief and consternation; and, in the extremity of his despair, even held out certain vague promises of a speedy improvement not only in the amount of his regular salary, but also in the contingent emoluments appertaining to his authorship. Finding Nicholas bent upon quitting the society (for he had now determined that, even if no further tidings came from Newman, he would, at all hazards, ease his mind by repairing to London and ascertaining the exact position of his sister) Mr. Crummles was fain to content himself by calculating the chances of his coming back again, and taking prompt and energetic measures to make the most of him before he went away.

"Let me see," said Mr. Crummles, taking off his outlaw's wig, the better to arrive at a cool-headed view of the whole case. "Let me see. This is Wednesday night. We'll have posters out the first thing in the morning, announcing positively your last appearance for to-morrow."

"But perhaps it may not be my last appearance, you know," said Nicholas. "Unless I am summoned away, I should be sorry to inconvenience you by leaving before the end of the week."

"So much the better," returned Mr. Crummles. "We can have positively your last appearance, on Thursday—re-engagement for one night more, on Friday—and, yielding to the wishes of numerous influential patrons, who were disappointed in obtaining seats, on Saturday. That ought to bring three very decent houses."

"Then I am to make three last appearances, am I?" inquired Nicholas, smiling.

"Yes," rejoined the manager, scratching his head with an air of some vexation; "three is not enough, and it's very bungling and irregular not to have more, but if we can't help it we can't, so there's no use in talking. A novelty

Digitized by Google

would be very desirable. You couldn't sing a comic song on the pony's back, could you?"

"No," replied Nicholas, "I couldn't indeed."

"It has drawn money before now," said Mr. Crummles with a look of disappointment. "What do you think of a brilliant display of fireworks?"

"That it would be rather expensive," replied Nicholas, drily.

"Eighteenpence would do it," said Mr. Crummles. "You on the top of a pair of steps with the phenomenon in an attitude; 'Farewell' on a transparency behind; and nine people at the wings with a squib in each hand—all the dozen and a half going off at once—it would be very grand—awful from the front, quite awful."

As Nicholas appeared by no means impressed with the solemnity of the proposed effect, but, on the contrary, received the proposition in a most irreverent manner, and laughed at it very heartily, Mr. Crummles abandoned the project in its birth, and gloomily observed that they must make up the best bill they could with combats and hornpipes, and so stick to the legitimate drama.

For the purpose of carrying this object into instant execution, the manager at once repaired to a small dressing-room, adjacent, where Mrs. Crummles was then occupied in exchanging the habiliments of a melodramatic empress for the ordinary attire of matrons in the nineteenth century. And with the assistance of this lady, and the accomplished Mrs. Grudden (who had quite a genius for making out bills, being a great hand at throwing in the notes of admiration, and knowing from long experience exactly where the largest capitals ought to go), he seriously applied himself to the composition of the poster.

"Heigho!" sighed Nicholas, as he threw himself back in the prompter's chair, after telegraphing the needful directions to Smike, who had been playing a meagre tailor in the

Digitized by Google

interlude, with one skirt to his coat, and a little pocket handkerchief with a large hole in it, and woollen night cap, and a red nose, and other distinctive marks peculiar to tailors on the stage. "Heigho! I wish all this were over."

"Over, Mr. Johnson!" repeated a female voice behind him, in a kind of plaintive surprise.

"It was an ungallant speech, certainly," said Nicholas, looking up to see who the speaker was, and recognising Miss Snevellicci. "I would not have made it if I had known you had been within hearing."

"What a dear that Mr. Digby is!" said Miss Snevellicci, as the tailor went off on the opposite side, at the end of the piece, with great applause. (Smike's theatrical name was Digby.)

"I'll tell him presently, for his gratification, that you said so," returned Nicholas.

"Oh you naughty thing!" rejoined Miss Snevellicci. "I don't know though, that I should much mind *his* knowing my opinion of him; with some other people, indeed, it might be——" Here Miss Snevellicci stopped, as though waiting to be questioned, but no questioning came, for Nicholas was thinking about more serious matters.

"How kind it is of you," resumed Miss Snevellicci, after a short silence, "to sit waiting here for him night after night, night after night, no matter how tired you are; and taking so much pains with him, and doing it all with as much delight and readiness as if you were coining gold by it!"

"He well deserves all the kindness I can show him, and a great deal more," said Nicholas. "He is the most grateful, single-hearted, affectionate creature, that ever breathed."

"So odd, too," remarked Miss Snevellicci, "isn't he?"

"God help him, and those who have made him so; he is indeed," rejoined Nicholas, shaking his head.

"He is such a devilish close chap," said Mr. Folair, who

Digitized by Google

had come up a little before, and now joined in the conversation. "Nobody can ever get anything out of him."

"What *should* they get out of him?" asked Nicholas, turning round with some abruptness.

"Zooks! what a fire-eater you are, Johnson!" returned Mr. Folair, pulling up the heel of his dancing shoe. "I'm only talking of the natural curiosity of the people here, to know what he has been about all his life."

"Poor fellow! it is pretty plain, I should think, that he has not the intellect to have been about anything of much importance to them or anybody else," said Nicholas.

"Ay," rejoined the actor, contemplating the effect of his face in a lamp reflector, "but that involves the whole question, you know."

"What question?" asked Nicholas.

"Why, the who he is and what he is, and how you two, who are so different, came to be such close companions," replied Mr. Folair, delighted with the opportunity of saying something disagreeable. "That's in everybody's mouth."

"The 'everybody' of the theatre, I suppose?" said Nicholas, contemptuously.

"In it and out of it too," replied the actor. "Why, you know, Lenville says——"

"I thought I had silenced him effectually," interrupted Nicholas, reddening.

"Perhaps you have," rejoined the immovable Mr. Folair; "if you have, he said this before he was silenced: Lenville says that you're a regular stick of an actor, and that it's only the mystery about you that has caused you to go down with the people here, and that Crummles keeps it up for his own sake; though Lenville says he don't believe there's anything at all in it, except your having got into a scrape and run away from somewhere, for doing something or other."

"Oh!" said Nicholas, forcing a smile.

"That's a part of what he says," added Mr. Folair. "I

Digitized by Google

mention it as the friend of both parties, and in strict confidence. *I* don't agree with him, you know. He says he takes Digby to be more knave than fool; and old Fluggers, who does the heavy business you know, *he* says that when he delivered messages at Covent Garden the season before last, there used to be a pickpocket hovering about the coach-stand who had exactly the face of Digby; though as he very properly says, Digby may not be the same, but only his brother, or some near relation."

"Oh!" cried Nicholas again.

"Yes," said Mr. Folair, with undisturbed calmness, "that's what they say. I thought I'd tell you, because really you ought to know. Oh! here's this blessed phenomenon at last. Ugh, you little imposition, I should like to —quite ready, my darling,—humbug—Ring up, Mrs. G., and let the favourite wake 'em!"

Uttering in a loud voice such of the latter allusions as were complimentary to the unconscious phenomenon, and giving the rest in a confidential "aside" to Nicholas, Mr. Folair followed the ascent of the curtain with his eyes, regarded with a sneer the reception of Miss Crummles as the Maiden, and, falling back a step or two to advance with the better effect, uttered a preliminary howl, and "went on" chattering his teeth and brandishing his tin tomahawk as the Indian Savage.

"So these are some of the stories they invent about us, and bandy from mouth to mouth!" thought Nicholas. "If a man would commit an inexpiable offence against any society, large or small, let him be successful. They will forgive him any crime but that."

"You surely don't mind what that malicious creature says, Mr. Johnson?" observed Miss Snevellicci in her most winning tones.

"Not I," replied Nicholas. "If I were going to remain here, I might think it worth my while to embroil myself.

Digitized by Google

As it is, let them talk till they are hoarse. But here," added Nicholas, as Smike approached, "here comes the subject of a portion of their good-nature, so let he and I say good night together."

"No, I will not let either of you say anything of the kind," returned Miss Snevellicci. "You must come home and see mama, who only came to Portsmouth to-day, and is dying to behold you. Led, my dear, persuade Mr. Johnson."

"Oh, I'm sure," returned Miss Ledrook, with considerable vivacity, "if *you* can't persuade him—" Miss Ledrook said no more, but intimated, by a dexterous playfulness, that if Miss Snevellicci couldn't persuade him, nobody could.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lillyvick have taken lodgings in our house, and share our sitting-room for the present," said Miss Snevellicci. "Won't that induce you?"

"Surely," returned Nicholas, "I can require no possible inducement beyond your invitation."

"Oh no! I dare say," rejoined Miss Snevellicci. And Miss Ledrook said, "Upon my word!" Upon which Miss Snevellicci said that Miss Ledrook was a giddy thing; and Miss Ledrook said that Miss Snevellicci needn't colour up quite so much; and Miss Snevellicci beat Miss Ledrook, and Miss Ledrook beat Miss Snevellicci.

"Come," said Miss Ledrook, "it's high time we were there, or we shall have poor Mrs. Snevellicci thinking that you have run away with her daughter, Mr. Johnson; and then we should have a pretty to-do."

"My dear Led," remonstrated Miss Snevellicci, "how you do talk!"

Miss Ledrook made no answer, but taking Smike's arm in hers, left her friend and Nicholas to follow at their pleasure; which it pleased them, or rather pleased Nicholas, who had no great fancy for a *tete-a-tete* under the circumstances, to do at once.

Digitized by Google

There were not wanting matters of conversation when they reached the street, for it turned out that Miss Snevellicci had a small basket to carry home, and Miss Ledrook a small bandbox, both containing such minor articles of theatrical costume as the lady performers usually carried to and fro every evening. Nicholas would insist upon carrying the basket, and Miss Snevellicci would insist upon carrying it herself, which gave rise to a struggle, in which Nicholas captured the basket and the bandbox likewise. Then Nicholas said, that he wondered what could possibly be inside the basket, and attempted to peep in, whereat Miss Snevellicci screamed, and declared that if she thought he had seen, she was sure she should faint away. This declaration was followed by a similar attempt on the bandbox, and similar demonstrations on the part of Miss Ledrook, and then both ladies vowed that they wouldn't move a step further until Nicholas had promised that he wouldn't offer to peep again. At last Nicholas pledged himself to betray no further curiosity, and they walked on: both ladies giggling very much, and declaring that they never had seen such a wicked creature in all their born days—never.

Lightening the way with such pleasantry as this, they arrived at the tailor's house in no time; and here they made quite a little party, there being present besides Mr. Lillyvick and Mrs. Lillyvick, not only Miss Snevellicci's mama, but her papa also. And an uncommonly fine man Miss Snevellicci's papa was, with a hook nose, and white forehead, and curly black hair, and high cheek bones, and altogether quite a handsome face, only a little pimply as though with drinking. He had a very broad chest had Miss Snevellicci's papa, and he wore a threadbare blue dress coat buttoned with gilt buttons tight across it; and he no sooner saw Nicholas come into the room, than he whipped the two forefingers of his right hand in between the two centre buttons, and sticking his other arm gracefully a-kimbo,

Digitized by Google

seemed to say, "Now, here I am, my buck, and what have you got to say to me?"

Such was, and in such an attitude sat, Miss Snevellicci's papa, who had been in the profession ever since he had first played the ten-year-old imps in the Christmas pantomimes; who could sing a little, dance a little, fence a little, act a little, and do everything a little, but not much; who had been sometimes in the ballet, and sometimes in the chorus, at every theatre in London; who was always selected in virtue of his figure to play the military visitors and the speechless noblemen; who always wore a smart dress, and came on arm-in-arm with a smart lady in short petticoats,—and always did it too with such an air that people in the pit had been several times known to cry out "Bravo!" under the impression that he was somebody. Such was Miss Snevellicci's papa, upon whom some envious persons cast the imputation that he occasionally beat Miss Snevellicci's mama, who was still a dancer, with a neat little figure and some remains of good looks, and who now sat, as she danced, —being rather too old for the full glare of the footlights,— in the background.

To these good people Nicholas was presented with much formality. The introduction being completed, Miss Snevellicci's papa (who was scented with rum and water) said that he was delighted to make the acquaintance of a gentleman so highly talented; and furthermore remarked, that there hadn't been such a hit made—no, not since the first appearance of his friend Mr. Glavormelly, at the Coburg.

"You have seen him, sir?" said Miss Snevellicci's papa.

"No, really I never did," replied Nicholas.

"You never saw my friend Glavormelly, sir!" said Miss Snevellicci's papa. "Then you have never seen acting yet. If he had lived——"

"Oh, he is dead, is he?" interrupted Nicholas.

"He is," said Mr. Snevellicci, "but he isn't in West-

Digitized by Google

minster Abbey, more's the shame. He was a——. Well, no matter. He is gone to that bourne from whence no traveller returns. I hope he is appreciated *there*."

So saying, Miss Snevellicci's papa rubbed the tip of his nose with a very yellow silk handkerchief, and gave the company to understand that these recollections overcame him.

"Well Mr. Lillyvick," said Nicholas, "and how are you?"

"Quite well, sir," replied the collector. "There is nothing like the married state, sir, depend upon it."

"Indeed?" said Nicholas, laughing.

"Nothing like it, sir," replied Mr. Lillyvick solemnly. "How do you think?" whispered the collector, drawing him aside, "How do you think she looks to-night?"

"As handsome as ever," replied Nicholas, glancing at the late Miss Petowker.

"Why, there's a air about her, sir," whispered the collector, "that I never saw in anybody. Look at her, now she moves to put the kettle on. There! Isn't it fascination, sir?"

"You're a lucky man," said Nicholas.

"Ha, ha, ha!" rejoined the collector. "No. Do you think I am though, eh? Perhaps I may be, perhaps I may be. I say, I couldn't have done much better if I had been a young man, could I? You couldn't have done much better yourself, could you—eh—could you?" With such inquiries, and many more such, Mr. Lillyvick jerked his elbow into Nicholas's side, and chuckled till his face became quite purple in the attempt to keep down his satisfaction.

Next day the posters appeared in due course, and the public were informed, in all the colours of the rainbow, and in letters afflicted with every possible variation of spinal deformity, how that Mr. Johnson would have the honour of making his last appearance that evening, and how that an

Digitized by Google

early application for places was requested, in consequence of the extraordinary overflow attendant on his performances. It being a remarkable fact in theatrical history, but one long since established beyond dispute, that it is a hopeless endeavour to attract people to a theatre unless they can be first brought to believe that they will never get into it.

Nicholas was somewhat at a loss, on entering the theatre at night, to account for the unusual perturbation and excitement visible in the countenances of all the company, but he was not long in doubt as to the cause, for before he could make any inquiry respecting it Mr. Crummles approached, and in an agitated tone of voice, informed him that there was a London manager in the boxes.

"It's the phenomenon, depend upon it, sir," said Crummles, dragging Nicholas to the little hole in the curtain that he might look through at the London manager. "I have not the smallest doubt it's the fame of the phenomenon—that's the man: him in the great-coat and no shirt-collar. She shall have ten pound a-week, Johnson; she shall not appear on the London boards for a farthing less. They shan't engage her either, unless they engage Mrs. Crummles too—twenty pound a-week for the pair; or I'll tell you what, I'll throw in myself and the two boys, and they shall have the family for thirty. I can't say fairer than that. They must take us all, if none of us will go without the others. That's the way some of the London people do, and it always answers. Thirty pound a-week. It's too cheap, Johnson. It's dirt cheap."

Nicholas replied, that it certainly was; and Mr. Vincent Crummles taking several huge pinches of snuff to compose his feelings, hurried away to tell Mrs. Crummles that he had quite settled the only terms that could be accepted, and had resolved not to abate one single farthing.

When everybody was dressed and the curtain went up, the excitement occasioned by the presence of the London

Digitized by Google

manager increased a thousand-fold. Everybody happened to know that the London manager had come down specially to witness his or her own performance, and all were in a flutter of anxiety and expectation. Some of those who were not on in the first scene, hurried to the wings, and there stretched their necks to have a peep at him; others stole up into the two little private boxes over the stage-doors, and from that position reconnoitred the London manager. Once the London manager was seen to smile. He smiled at the comic countryman's pretending to catch a blue-bottle, while Mrs. Crummles was making her greatest effect. "Very good, my fine fellow," said Mr. Crummles, shaking his fist at the comic countryman when he came off, "you leave this company next Saturday night."

In the same way, everybody who was on the stage beheld no audience but one individual; everybody played to the London manager. When Mr. Lenville in a sudden burst of passion called the emperor a miscreant, and then biting his glove, said, "But I must dissemble," instead of looking gloomily at the boards and so waiting for his cue, as is proper in such cases, he kept his eye fixed upon the London manager. When Miss Bravassa sang her song at her lover, who according to custom stood ready to shake hands with her between the verses, they looked, not at each other but at the London manager. Mr. Crummles died point blank at him; and when the two guards came in to take the body off after a very hard death, it was seen to open its eyes and glance at the London manager. At length the London manager was discovered to be asleep, and shortly after that he woke up and went away, whereupon all the company fell foul of the unhappy comic countryman, declaring that his buffoonery was the sole cause; and Mr. Crummles said, that he had put up with it a long time, but that he really couldn't stand it any longer, and therefore would feel obliged by his looking out for another engagement.

Digitized by Google

All this was the occasion of much amusement to Nicholas, whose only feeling upon the subject was one of sincere satisfaction that the great man went away before he appeared. He went through his part in the two last pieces as briskly as he could, and having been received with unbounded favour and unprecedented applause—so said the bills for next day, which had been printed an hour or two before—he took Smike's arm and walked home to bed.

With the post next morning came a letter from Newman Noggs, very inky, very short, very dirty, very small, and very mysterious, urging Nicholas to return to London instantly; not to lose an instant; to be there at night if possible.

"I will," said Nicholas. "Heaven knows I have remained here for the best, and sorely against my own will; but even now I may have dallied too long. What can have happened? Smike, my good fellow, here—take my purse. Put our things together, and pay what little debts we owe—quick, and we shall be in time for the morning coach. I will only tell them that we are going, and will return to you immediately."

So saying, he took his hat, and hurrying away to the lodgings of Mr. Crummles, applied his hand to the knocker with such hearty good-will, that he awakened that gentleman, who was still in bed, and caused Mr. Bulph the pilot to take his morning's pipe very nearly out of his mouth in the extremity of his surprise.

The door being opened, Nicholas ran upstairs without any ceremony, and bursting into the darkened sitting-room on the one-pair front, found that the two Master Crummleses had sprung out of the sofa-bedstead and were putting on their clothes with great rapidity, under the impression that it was the middle of the night, and the next house was on fire.

Before he could undeceive them Mr. Crummles came

Digitized by Google

down in a flannel-gown and night-cap; and to him Nicholas briefly explained that circumstances had occurred which rendered it necessary for him to repair to London immediately.

"So good bye," said Nicholas; "good bye, good bye."

He was half-way downstairs before Mr. Crummles had sufficiently recovered his surprise to gasp out something about the posters.

"I can't help it," replied Nicholas. "Set whatever I may have earned this week against them, or if that will not repay you, say at once what will. Quick, quick."

"We'll cry quits about that," returned Crummles. "But can't we have one last night more?"

"Not an hour—not a minute," replied Nicholas, impatiently.

"Won't you stop to say something to Mrs. Crummles?" asked the manager, following him down to the door.

"I couldn't stop if it were to prolong my life a score of years," rejoined Nicholas. "Here, take my hand, and with it my hearty thanks.—Oh! that I should have been fooling here!"

Accompanying these words with an impatient stamp on the ground, he tore himself from the manager's detaining grasp, and darting rapidly down the street was out of sight in an instant.

"Dear me, dear me," said Mr. Crummles, looking wistfully towards the point at which he had just disappeared; "if he only acted like that, what a deal of money he'd draw! He should have kept upon this circuit; he'd have been very useful to me. But he don't know what's good for him. He is an impetuous youth. Young men are rash, very rash."

Mr. Crummles being in a moralising mood, might possibly have moralised for some minutes longer if he had not mechanically put his hand towards his waistcoat pocket, where he was accustomed to keep his snuff. The absence

Digitized by Google

of any pocket at all in the usual direction, suddenly recalled to his recollection the fact that he had no waistcoat on; and this leading him to a contemplation of the extreme scantiness of his attire, he shut the door abruptly, and retired upstairs with great precipitation.

Smike had made good speed while Nicholas was absent, and with his help everything was soon ready for their departure. They scarcely stopped to take a morsel of breakfast, and in less than half an hour arrived at the coach-office: quite out of breath with the haste they had made to reach it in time. There were yet a few minutes to spare, so, having secured the places, Nicholas hurried into a slopseller's hard by, and bought Smike a great-coat. It would have been rather large for a substantial yeoman, but the shopman averring (and with considerable truth) that it was a most uncommon fit, Nicholas would have purchased it in his impatience if it had been twice the size.

As they hurried up to the coach, which was now in the open street and all ready for starting, Nicholas was not a little astonished to find himself suddenly clutched in a close and violent embrace, which nearly took him off his legs; nor was his amazement at all lessened by hearing the voice of Mr. Crummles exclaim, "It is he—my friend, my friend!"

"Bless my heart," cried Nicholas, struggling in the manager's arms, "what are you about?"

The manager made no reply, but strained him to his breast again, exclaiming as he did so, "Farewell, my noble, my lion-hearted boy!"

In fact, Mr. Crummles, who could never lose any opportunity for professional display, had turned out for the express purpose of taking a public farewell of Nicholas; and to render it the more imposing, he was now, to that young gentleman's most profound annoyance, inflicting upon him a rapid succession of stage embraces, which, as everybody

Digitized by Google

knows, are performed by the embracer's laying his or her chin on the shoulder of the object of affection, and looking over it. This Mr. Crummles did in the highest style of melodrama, pouring forth at the same time all the most dismal forms of farewell he could think of, out of the stock pieces. Nor was this all, for the elder Master Crummles was going through a similar ceremony with Smike; while Master Percy Crummles, with a very little second-hand camlet-cloak, worn theatrically over his left shoulder, stood by, in the attitude of an attendant officer, waiting to convey the two victims to the scaffold.

The lookers-on laughed very heartily, and as it was as well to put a good face upon the matter, Nicholas laughed too when he had succeeded in disengaging himself; and rescuing the astonished Smike, climbed up to the coach roof after him, and kissed his hand in honour of the absent Mrs. Crummles as they rolled away.

5—LONG AFTERWARDS

Long afterwards Nicholas found himself poring with the utmost interest over a large play-bill hanging outside a Minor Theatre which he had to pass on his way home, and reading a list of the actors and actresses who had promised to do honour to some approaching benefit, with as much gravity as if it had been a catalogue of the names of those ladies and gentlemen who stood highest upon the Book of Fate, and he had been looking anxiously for his own. He glanced at the top of the bill, with a smile at his own dullness, as he prepared to resume his walk, and there saw announced, in large letters, with a large space between each of them, "Positively the last appearance of Mr. Vincent Crummles of Provincial Celebrity!!!"

"Nonsense!" said Nicholas, turning back again. "It can't be."

Digitized by Google

But there it was. In one line by itself was an announcement of the first night of a new melodrama; in another line by itself was an announcement of the last six nights of an old one; a third line was devoted to the re-engagement of the unrivalled African Knife-swallower, who had kindly suffered himself to be prevailed upon to forego his country engagements for one week longer; a fourth line announced that Mr. Snittle Timberry, having recovered from his last severe indisposition, would have the honour of appearing that evening; a fifth line said that there were "Cheers, Tears, and Laughter!" every night; a sixth, that that was positively the last appearance of Mr. Vincent Crummles of Provincial Celebrity.

"Surely it must be the same man," thought Nicholas. "There can't be two Vincent Crummleses."

The better to settle this question he referred to the bill again, and finding that there was a Baron in the first piece, and that Roberto (his son) was enacted by one Master Crummles, and Spaletro (his nephew) by one Master Percy Crummles—*their* last appearances—and that, incidental to that piece, was a characteristic dance by the characters, and a castanet pas seul by the Infant Phenomenon—*her* last appearance—he no longer entertained any doubt; and presenting himself at the stage door, and sending in a scrap of paper with "Mr. Johnson" written thereon in pencil, was presently conducted by a Robber with a very large belt and buckle round his waist, and very large leather gauntlets on his hands, into the presence of his former manager.

Mr. Crummles was unfeignedly glad to see him, and starting up from before a small dressing-glass, with one very bushy eyebrow stuck on crooked over his left eye, and the fellow eyebrow and the calf of one of his legs in his hand, embraced him cordially; at the same time observing, that it would do Mrs. Crummles's heart good to bid him good-bye before they went.

Digitized by Google

"You were always a favourite of hers, Johnson," said Crummles, "always were from the first. I was quite easy in my mind about you from that first day you dined with us. One that Mrs. Crummles took a fancy to was sure to turn out right. Ah! Johnson, what a woman that is!"

"I am sincerely obliged to her for her kindness in this and all other respects," said Nicholas. "But where are you going, that you talk about bidding good-bye?"

"Haven't you seen it in the papers?" said Crummles, with some dignity.

"No," replied Nicholas.

"I wonder at that," said the manager. "It was among the varieties. I had the paragraph here somewhere—but I don't know—oh, yes, here it is."

So saying, Mr. Crummles, after pretending that he thought he must have lost it, produced a square inch of newspaper from the pocket of the pantaloons he wore in private life (which, together with the plain clothes of several other gentlemen, lay scattered about on a kind of dresser in the room), and gave it to Nicholas to read:

"The talented Vincent Crummles, long favourably known to fame as a country manager and actor of no ordinary pretensions, is about to cross the Atlantic on an histrionic expedition. Crummles is to be accompanied, we hear, by his lady and gifted family. We know no man superior to Crummles in his particular line of character, or one who, whether as a public or private individual, could carry with him the best wishes of a larger circle of friends. Crummles is certain to succeed."

"Here's another bit," said Mr. Crummles, handing over a still smaller scrap. "This is from the notices to correspondents, this one."

Nicholas read it aloud. "'Philo-Dramaticus. Crummles, the country manager and actor, cannot be more than forty-three, or forty-four years of age. Crummles is NOT a Prus-

Digitized by Google

sian, having been born at Chelsea.' Humph!" said Nicholas, "that's an odd paragraph."

"Very," returned Crummles, scratching the side of his nose, and looking at Nicholas with an assumption of great unconcern. "I can't think who puts these things in. *I* didn't."

Still keeping his eye on Nicholas, Mr. Crummles shook his head twice or thrice with profound gravity, and remarking, that he could not for the life of him imagine how the newspapers found out the things they did, folded up the extracts and put them in his pocket again.

"I am astonished to hear this news," said Nicholas. "Going to America! You had no such thing in contemplation when I was with you."

"No," replied Crummles, "I hadn't then. The fact is, that Mrs. Crummles—most extraordinary woman, Johnson." Here he broke off and whispered something in his ear.

"Oh!" said Nicholas, smiling. "The prospect of an addition to your family?"

"The seventh addition, Johnson," returned Mr. Crummles, solemnly. "I thought such a child as the Phenomenon must have been a closer; but it seems we are to have another. She is a very remarkable woman."

"I congratulate you," said Nicholas, "and I hope this may prove a phenomenon too."

"Why, it's pretty sure to be something uncommon, I suppose," rejoined Mr. Crummles. "The talent of the other three is principally in combat and serious pantomime. I should like this one to have a turn for juvenile tragedy; I understand they want something of that sort in America very much. However, we must take it as it comes. Perhaps it may have a genius for the tight-rope. It may have any sort of genius, in short, if it takes after its mother, Johnson, for she is a universal genius; but, whatever its genius is, that genius shall be developed."

Digitized by Google

Expressing himself after these terms, Mr. Crummles put on his other eyebrow, and the calves of his legs, and then put on his legs, which were of a yellowish flesh-colour, and rather soiled about the knees, from frequent going down upon those joints, in curses, prayers, last struggles, and other strong passages.

While the ex-manager completed his toilet, he informed Nicholas that as he should have a fair start in America, from the proceeds of a tolerably good engagement which he had been fortunate enough to obtain, and as he and Mrs Crummles could scarcely hope to act for ever (not being immortal, except in the breath of Fame and in a figurative sense), he had made up his mind to settle there permanently, in the hope of acquiring some land of his own which would support them in their old age, and which they could afterwards bequeath to their children. Nicholas, having highly commended this resolution, Mr. Crummles went on to impart such further intelligence relative to their mutual friends as he thought might prove interesting; informing Nicholas, among other things, that Miss Snevellicci was happily married to an affluent young wax-chandler who had supplied the theatre with candles, and that Mr. Lillyvick didn't dare to say his soul was his own, such was the tyrannical sway of Mrs. Lillyvick, who reigned paramount and supreme.

Nicholas responded to this confidence on the part of Mr. Crummles, by confiding to him his own name, situation, and prospects, and informing him in as few general words as he could, of the circumstances which had led to their first acquaintance. After congratulating him with great heartiness on the improved state of his fortunes, Mr. Crummles gave him to understand that next morning he and his were to start for Liverpool, where the vessel lay which was to carry them from the shores of England, and that if Nicholas wished to take a last adieu of Mrs. Crummles, he must

Digitized by Google

repair with him that night to a farewell-supper, given in honour of the family at a neighbouring tavern; at which Mr. Snittle Timberry would preside while the honours of the vice-chair would be sustained by the African Swallower.

The room being by this time very warm and somewhat crowded, in consequence of the influx of four gentlemen who had just killed each other in the piece under representation, Nicholas accepted the invitation, and promised to return at the conclusion of the performances; preferring the cool air and twilight out of doors to the mingled perfume of gas, orange-peel, and gunpowder, which pervaded the hot and glaring theatre.

He availed himself of this interval to buy a silver snuff-box—the best his funds would afford—as a token of remembrance for Mr. Crummles, and having purchased besides a pair of earrings for Mrs. Crummles, a necklace for the Phenomenon, and a flaming shirt-pin for each of the young gentlemen, he refreshed himself with a walk, and returning a little after the appointed time, found the lights out, the theatre empty, the curtain raised for the night, and Mr. Crummles walking up and down the stage expecting his arrival.

"Timberry won't be long," said Mr. Crummles. "He played the audience out to-night. He does a faithful black in the last piece, and it takes him a little longer to wash himself."

"A very unpleasant line of character, I should think?" said Nicholas.

"No, I don't know," replied Mr. Crummles; "it comes off easily enough, and there's only the face and neck. We had a first-tragedy man in our company once, who, when he played Othello, used to black himself all over. But that's feeling a part and going into it as if you meant it; it isn't usual; more's the pity."

Mr. Snittle Timberry now appeared, arm in arm with the

Digitized by Google

African Swallower, and, being introduced to Nicholas, raised his hat half-a-foot, and said he was proud to know him. The Swallower said the same, and looked and spoke remarkably like an Irishman.

"I see by the bills that you have been ill, sir," said Nicholas to Mr. Timberry. "I hope you are none the worse for your exertions to-night?"

Mr. Timberry, in reply, shook his head with a gloomy air, tapped his chest several times with great significancy, and drawing his cloak more closely about him, said, "But no matter, no matter. Come!"

It is observable that when people upon the stage are in any strait involving the very last extremity of weakness and exhaustion, they invariably perform feats of strength requiring great ingenuity and muscular power. Thus, a wounded prince or bandit-chief, who is bleeding to death and too faint to move, except to the softest music (and then only upon his hands and knees), shall be seen to approach a cottage door for aid, in such a series of writhings and twistings, and with such curlings up of the legs, and such rollings over and over, and such gettings up and tumblings down again, as could never be achieved save by a very strong man skilled in posture-making. And so natural did this sort of performance come to Mr. Snittle Timberry, that on their way out of the theatre and towards the tavern where the supper was to be holden, he testified the severity of his recent indisposition and its wasting effects upon the nervous system, by a series of gymnastic performances which were the admiration of all witnesses.

"Why, this is indeed a joy I had not looked for!" said Mrs. Crummles, when Nicholas was presented.

"Nor I," replied Nicholas. "It is by a mere chance that I have this opportunity of seeing you, although I would have made a great exertion to have availed myself of it."

"Here is one whom you know," said Mrs. Crummles,

Digitized by Google

thrusting forward the Phenomenon in a blue gauze frock, extensively flounced, and trousers of the same; "and here another—and another," presenting the Masters Crummles. "And how is your friend, the faithful Digby?"

"Digby!" said Nicholas, forgetting at the instant that this had been Smike's theatrical name. "Oh, yes. He's quite—what am I saying?—he is very far from well."

"How!" exclaimed Mrs. Crummles, with a tragic recoil.

"I fear," said Nicholas, shaking his head, and making an attempt to smile, "that your better-half would be more struck with him now, than ever."

"What mean you?" rejoined Mrs. Crummles, in her most popular manner. "Whence comes this altered tone?"

"I mean that a dastardly enemy of mine has struck at me through him, and that while he thinks to torture me, he inflicts on him such agonies of terror and suspense as—— You will excuse me, I am sure," said Nicholas, checking himself. "I should never speak of this, and never do, except to those who know the facts, but for a moment I forgot myself."

With this hasty apology Nicholas stooped down to salute the Phenomenon, and changed the subject; inwardly cursing his precipitation, and very much wondering what Mrs. Crummles must think of so sudden an explosion.

The lady seemed to think very little about it, for the supper being by this time on table, she gave her hand to Nicholas and repaired with a stately step to the left hand of Mr. Snittle Timberry. Nicholas had the honour to support her, and Mr. Crummles was placed upon the chairman's right; the Phenomenon and the Masters Crummles sustained the vice.

The company amounted in number to some twenty-five or thirty, being composed of such members of the theatrical profession, then engaged or disengaged in London, as were numbered among the most intimate friends of Mr. and Mrs.

Digitized by Google

Crummles. The ladies and gentlemen were pretty equally balanced; the expenses of the entertainment being defrayed by the latter, each of whom had the privilege of inviting one of the former as his guest.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Dramatizations of Dickens

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE DRAMATIZATIONS OF DICKENS

BECAUSE of his great throng of tempting characters and because scene after scene in his tales is a-tingle with the electricity of the dramatic, the novels of Dickens have ever been prey to the ready playwright.

Just as no player worth his salt can follow Fagin or Jingle or Sydney Carton through the pages of the books without itching to embody them on the stage, so no dramatist can read such scenes as the interrupted Christmas dinner at Joe Gargery's or the tantalizing dialogue between Eugene Wrayburn and Bradley Headstone without feeling a strong impulse to put them immediately into play form.

Comedies and melodramas and operettas have been fashioned more or less faithfully from the Dickens stories for the theatre of every country under the sun and I have seen in one place or another a record of a dramatization of every tale he ever told, save only "Hunted Down."

John O'Toole as the Artful Dodger, Irving as Sikes

Digitized by Google

and as Jingle, Jennie Lee as Joe, Tree as Fagin and as John Jasper, Janauschek as Lady Dedlock, Lotta as the Marchioness, Jefferson as Newman Noggs, W. J. Florence as Cuttle—these were famous performances.

Playgoers in America since 1900 might have seen the stage version of "A Tale of Two Cities" which was called "The Only Way" and which enlisted the services of Henry Miller as Carton; Louis N. Parker's arrangement of Copperfield, which he called "The Highway of Life" and which had a brief and painful career at Wallack's (the late Sir Herbert Tree played this in London, doubling energetically as Peggotty and Micawber); a production in the grand manner of "Oliver Twist," with Nat Goodwin as Fagin, Constance Collier as Nancy, Lyn Harding as Bill, and Marie Doro, very plaintive and feminine, as Oliver; Joseph Jefferson as Caleb Plummer in a dramatization of "The Cricket on the Hearth," which served him for many seasons; Lulu Glaser as Dolly in "Dolly Varden," a pretty comic opera made out of patches of "Barnaby Rudge," and, in a musical show, none other than De Wolf Hopper trying vainly to disguise his height and aspect behind the spectacles and gaiters of Mr. Pickwick.

These, at least, I myself came across without looking for them. Quite the contrary. Of an attempt to search the records for a complete list of all the Dickens plays, I am innocent. S. J. Adair Fitzgerald in his book on Dickens and the stage has done that somewhat

Digitized by Google

A Dramatization of "A Tale of Two Cities," at the Lyceum Theatre, London, 1860

(From the Shaw Collection)

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ungrateful task quite sufficiently for all time. Such a search does, to be sure, take on the nature of a game of hide-and-seek, so completely do some of the dramatizations lurk behind the new titles which the adaptors, for one reason or another, would be pretty sure to give them.

Most of us would recognize "Bleak House" in "Move On: or the Crossing Sweeper" and in "Jo, the Waif: or the Mystery of Chesney Wood." But would we be quite so sure of "Chesney Wold," in which Janauschek doubled with great gusto as Lady Dedlock and Hortense? Most of us would recognize "The Golden Dustman," but how many would suspect "Hard Times" of having inspired "Under the Earth: or Sons of Toil"? The game grows more difficult when you go abroad and must retain an unfamiliar association through translation into another tongue. Of course it took no great penetration to detect the origins of the play called "Klein Dorrit," which was running in Berlin in 1906, but I vow I went to "Le Grillon du Foyer" at the Odéon during the war, knowing quite well what "grillon" meant and what "foyer," and yet without suspecting, until the first-act was half unfolded, that I was seeing my old friend Caleb Plummer again, Caleb listening fondly to a cricket that was played in the fireplace by an oboe, with its song written especially for the purpose by Massenet. Most of us would recognize "Little Em'ly" or "Lost Em'ly," but who would look for

Digitized by Google

Peggotty in a play called "The Deal Boatman"? And who is a good enough Dickensian to detect at once the novel dramatized in "Born with a Caul"?

Really, the explanation of all the Dickens plays lies in the implications of that title. You trace it, of course, to that second page in the first chapter of "David Copperfield" where the story runs as follows:

I was born with a caul, which was advertised for sale, in the newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas. Whether sea-going people were short of money about that time, or were short of faith and preferred cork jackets, I don't know; all I know is, that there was but one solitary bidding, and that was from an attorney connected with the bill-broking business, who offered two pounds in cash, and the balance in sherry, but declined to be guaranteed from drowning on any higher bargain. Consequently the advertisement was withdrawn as a dead loss—for as to sherry, my poor dear mother's own sherry was in the market then—and ten years afterwards the caul was put up in a raffle down in our part of the country, to fifty members at half-a-crown a head, the winner to spend five shillings. I was present myself, and I remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused, at a part of myself being disposed of in that way. The caul was won, I recollect, by an old lady with a hand-basket, who, very reluctantly, produced from it the stipulated five shillings, all in halfpence, and twopence halfpenny short—as it took an immense time and a great waste of arithmetic, to endeavour without any effect to prove to her. It is a fact which will be long remembered as remarkable down there, that she was never drowned, but died triumphantly in bed, at ninety-two. I have understood that it was, to the last, her proudest boast that she never had been on the water in her life, except

Digitized by Google

upon a bridge; and that over her tea (to which she was extremely partial) she, to the last, expressed her indignation at the impiety of mariners and others, who had the presumption to go "meandering" about the world. It was in vain to represent to her that some conveniences, tea perhaps included, resulted from this objectionable practice. She always returned, with greater emphasis and with an instinctive knowledge of the strength of her objection: "Let us have no meandering."

Of the quality and abundance of Dickens's genius there is, in all the books, no better exhibit than that one paragraph, not merely because the deathless character which it presents is in herself a delightful acquaintance, but because his capacity to create such characters was so limitless that he could afford to cast her off casually. She is never named. She enters a great novel on its second page, makes her exit on the same page, and is never heard of again. And it is that capacity which lends the greatest regret to the fact that Dickens never did try hard enough to shift from his habitual medium to the dramatic form, for he had the kind of gift at creation of human beings which is inseparable from the dramatic form and which separates the great playwrights like Æschylus and Shakespeare and Ibsen from the lesser playwrights of each renaissance of the theatre.

Dickens, as has been said, did try his hand at playwriting and even thought, at times, of doing his own dramatizations. He had a finger, though not the controlling one, in the "No Thoroughfare" play, of which

Digitized by Google

Wilkie Collins wrote the major part and which was presented by Fechter at the Adelphi in London while Dickens was in America on his second visit. The play had gone off the boards by the time he returned, so that he had to go to Paris to see it under the title of "L'Abime." Long before that, he had been quite pathetically eager to be permitted to dramatize his own "Oliver Twist." Under date of October, 1838, he was writing confidently to Frederick Yates, the actor-manager, as follows:

Supposing we arrange preliminaries for our mutual satisfaction I propose to dramatize "Oliver Twist" for the first night of next season. I have never seen Mrs. Honner, but from the mere circumstance of her being a Mrs., I should say at once that she was "a many sizes too big" for Oliver Twist. If it be played by a female it should be a very sharp girl of 13 or 14, or the character would be an absurdity. I don't see any possibility of any other house doing it before your next opening night. If they do, it must be done in a very extraordinary manner, as the story, unlike that of "Pickwick," is an involved and complicated one. I am quite certain that no one can have heard what I am going to do with the different characters in the end, inasmuch as, at present, I don't quite know myself. So we are tolerably safe on that head. I am quite certain that your name as the Jew and mine as the author would knock any other attempt quite out of the field.

In the same year, a notation in Macready's Diary reads as follows:

"Forster and Dickens called and I told them of the

Digitized by Google

utter impossibility of 'Oliver Twist' for any dramatic purpose."

The memory of which disappointment was probably burning Dickens's ears that night a little later when he and Forster did go to see "Oliver Twist" at the Surrey-theatre, a dramatization so painful to the father of that workhouse child that, as Forster tells, "in the middle of the first scene he laid him down upon the floor in a corner of the box and never rose from it until the drop-scene fell."

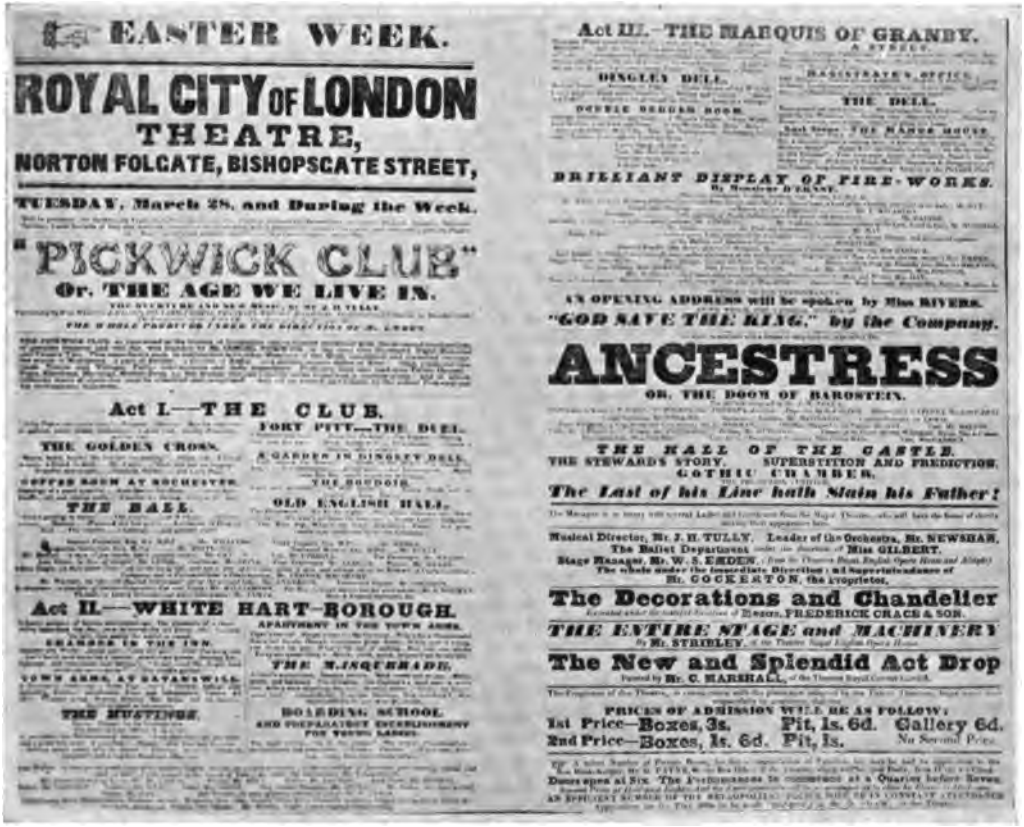
Indeed, he witnessed or heard of all such stage versions with mingled emotions, an enormous curiosity as to how it had been managed, an intense anguish when the impersonations departed absurdly from the portraits he had painted, and a genuine and undying exasperation because, under the loose laws of the day, he could never deflect any of the royalties or profits into his own coffers. Against the pirates who swarmed aboard each book of his as soon as it had appeared (or even while it was in the process of appearing) he lay about him with a bludgeon all his days and always without the slightest effect on the pirates or on the laws which permitted them to live at his expense. In the middle of the farewell supper to Vincent Crummles, he could not resist pausing and bidding Nicholas, of all people, get up and speak his mind on this, a subject which could not, by the widest stretch of the imagination, be supposed to interest Nicholas.

Digitized by Google

This blast, seemingly, was aimed at a pot-boiling playwright named William Moncrieff, whose three-act adaptation called "Sam Weller; or, the Pickwickians" was running in the Strand with a final scene showing Sam and Mr. Pickwick at the Coronation of Victoria. It was accompanied by a complacent "Advertisement" in which Moncrieff said:

Some injudicious friends of Mr. Dickens, among his brethren of the Press (preserve me from such friends say I—of course I do not allude to the manly, fair-dealing, daily Press, to which I am under the greatest obligations) have chosen to display much soreness at the complete manner in which I have triumphed over all the difficulties I had to encounter in my undertaking. Every wretched mongrel can, I am aware, dramatize the "Pickwick Papers" now that I have shown them how, by closely copying all I have done; as is the case with a low minor theatre, in the purlieus of London—*once* respectable; but even the original author will admit that he had never contemplated his matter could have been so compressed, and his incidents put in so connected a form, as they assume in "Sam Weller"!—a character, by the by, which I should think was only an after-conception of its creator, and formed no part of his original projection. Mr. Dickens has, by far, too much genius, to nourish any of the petty feelings evinced by his fostering friends! whose articles, being those of the "high, intellectual" Sunday-school of criticism, are greatly too genteel and abstruse for every-day reading, but must be kept for Lord's-day examination only! Why these gentry should object to my having dramatised Mr. Dickens, I cannot conceive. Sir Walter Scott, a name, I humbly submit, of sufficient merit to be mentioned in the same page with the writer of the "Pickwick Club," always looked upon Mr. Pocock's and

Digitized by Google



EASTER WEEK.

ROYAL CITY OF LONDON THEATRE,

NORTON FOLGATE, BISHOPSCATE STREET,

TUESDAY, March 28, and During the Week.

"PICKWICK CLUB"

Or, THE AGE WE LIVE IN.

Act I.—THE CLUB.

THE GOLDEN CROSS.

COFFEE ROOM AT ROCHESTER.

THE BALL.

FORT PITT.—THE DUEL.

A GARDEN IN DINGLEY DELL.

THE BOUDOIR.

OLD ENGLISH HALL.

Act II.—WHITE HART-BOROUGH.

APARTMENT IN THE TOWN ARMS.

CHAMBER IN THE INN.

TOWN ARMS, AT DATCHWICH.

THE HUSTINGS.

THE MASQUERADE.

BOARDING SCHOOL.

Act III.—THE MARQUIS OF GRANBY.

DINGLEY DELL.

MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE.

DOUBLE BEDDED ROOM.

THE DELL.

BRILLIANT DISPLAY OF FIRE-WORKS.

AN OPENING ADDRESS will be spoken by Miss RIVERS.

"GOD SAVE THE KING," by the Company.

ANCESTRESS

OR, THE DOOM OF BAROSTEIN.

THE HALL OF THE CASTLE.

THE STEWARD'S STORY. SUPERSTITION AND PREDICTION.

GOTHIC CHAMBER.

The Last of his Line hath Slain his Father!

Musical Director, Mr. J. H. TULLY. Leader of the Orchestra, Mr. NEWSHAM.

The Ballet Department under the direction of Miss GILBERT.

Stage Manager, Mr. W. S. ERDEN, (from the Theatres Royal, English Opera House and Adelphi)

The whole under the immediate Direction and Superintendance of

Mr. COCKERTON, the proprietor.

The Decorations and Chandelier

Executed under the superintendance of Messrs. FREDERICK CRACE & SON.

THE ENTIRE STAGE and MACHINERY

By Mr. STRIBLEY, of the Theatre Royal English Opera House.

The New and Splendid Act Drop

Painted by Mr. C. MARSHALL, of the Theatre Royal Covent Garden.

PRICES OF ADMISSION WILL BE AS FOLLOW:

1st Price—Boxes, 3s. Pit, 1s. 6d. Gallery 6d.

2nd Price—Boxes, 1s. 6d. Pit, 1s. No Second Price.

Doors open at Six. The Performances to commence at a Quarter before Seven.

The second presentation of "Pickwick Club," Royal City of London Theatre, March 28th, 1837. This rare bill advertises the second performance of the second version of the "Pickwick Papers," the first version being that of William Leman Rede at the Adelphi in October, 1836

(From the Collection of Milton J. Stone, President of the Boston Branch of the Dickens Fellowship)

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Mr. Terry's stage versions of those immortal fictions, "Rob Roy" and "Ivanhoe," rather as a compliment than otherwise; and I had undoubted precedent for what I did in the instance of the first dramatic writer of all time—Shakespeare! who has scarcely a play that is not founded on some previous drama, history, chronicle, popular tale, or story. What then means the twaddle of these "high intellectuals" in so pathetically condoling with Mr. Dickens, on the penalties he pays for his popularity in being put on the stage? Let these "high intellectuals" speak to Mr. Dickens's publishers, and they will learn it has rendered them, by increasing their sale, the most fortunate of Chapmen and dealers! It is wasting time to show the absurdity of these addle-pated persons, for their "blow hot and blow cold" articles are as incomprehensible to themselves as they are to everybody else. In one of them, I am, first of all, abused for having sacrilegiously meddled with any of Mr. Dickens's matter; and then abused for not having meddled with it enough. The reader is told that everybody is pleased with my piece; and is then informed that nobody should be pleased with it. Two or three low scenes between Sam and his father, taken from the original work, are lauded as "written in a fine spirit of humanity"; while some rather polite dialogues, that I have introduced, between the ladies, are blackguarded by this "high intellectual" as vulgar.

As soon as the number of "Nicholas" containing the Crummles dinner and the Dickens explosion was on the streets, the newspapers were all pointing slyly at Moncrieff who immediately retorted in a long and furious proclamation, in which he issued this *defi:*

Let Mr. Dickens—and he has five months before him—set his wits to work again and finish HIS "Nicholas Nickleby"

Digitized by Google

better than I have done, and I shall sink into the primitive mire, from which I have, for the moment, attempted to emerge by catching at the hem of his garment.

And then, growing angrier and angrier because Dickens had quoted one of his agreements to write seven melodramas for five pounds, Moncrieff continued to put the shoe on as follows:

Great as his talents are, he is not to fancy himself "Sir Oracle," and think that when he speaks no dog should "bark"; he should not attempt to "bestride us like a Colossus," and grumble that we "poor petty mortals should seek to creep between his legs." With all possible good feeling, I would beg to hint to Mr. Dickens that the depreciating the talents of another is but a shallow and envious way of attempting to raise one's own—that the calling the offending party a thief, sneering at his pecuniary circumstances and indulging in empty boasts of tavern treats are weapons of offence usually resorted to only by the very lowest orders. Nothing is more easy than to be ill-natured. I confess I write for my living, and it is no discredit to Mr. Dickens to say that those who know him best are aware he is as much indebted to his pen for the dinner of the day as I can possibly be. With respect to the "*six hundred generations*" through which Mr. Dickens expects his "pedestal should remain unshaken in the Temple of Fame," I can assure him I have never anticipated that any credit I might derive from dramatising Nicholas Nickleby would more than endure beyond as many days. Having himself *unsuccessfully* tried the Drama, there is some excuse for Mr. Dickens's petulance towards its professors; but it is somewhat illiberal and ungrateful that, being indebted to the stage for so many of his best characters — *Sam Weller*, from Beazley's

Digitized by Google

"Boarding House," for example—he should deny it a few in return.

All of which hot interchange is worth going over now if only to remind ourselves that it derives its grotesque one-sidedness largely from our present perspective, our knowledge of the stature of Dickens and of the insignificance of his opponent. Would not some of us, at the time, have watched with amusement from the sidelines and, as like as not, thought that Moncrieff rather had him there and there and there? On such incapacity to judge men and matters at close range, the Moncrieffs flourish, and their heirs even unto the Dr. Cooks and the Hohenzollerns of our own day.

Thirty years later, Dickens was still suffering. He had gone to America with the manuscript of the "No Thoroughfare" dramatization tucked under his arm and the incorrigible hope that he could arrange for its production here before the local pirates bestirred themselves. But exactly ten days after the first number of "No Thoroughfare" as a story had reached the Port of Boston, behold a stage version unfolded, with mingled talents for theft and prophecy, at a local theatre, of which the playbill, visible now in the Shaw Collection at the library in Harvard College, blandly boasted of the enterprise of the management in serving its public so quickly. Dickens wrote at once to Collins:

Pirates are producing their own wretched versions in all directions, thus (as Wills would say) anticipating and

Digitized by Google

glutting "the market." I registered our play as the property of Ticknor and Fields, American citizens. But, besides that the law on the point is extremely doubtful, the manager of the Museum Theatre, Boston, instantly announced his version (you may suppose what it is and how it is done, when I tell you that it was playing within ten days of the arrival of the Christmas number). Thereupon Ticknor and Fields gave him notice that he mustn't play it. Of course he knew very well that if an injunction were applied for against him, there would be an immediate howl against my persecution of an innocent, and he played it. Then the whole host of pirates rushed in and it is being done, in some mangled form or other, everywhere.

And later he wrote to Fechter: "Why should they pay for the piece as you play it, when all they want is my name, and they can get that for nothing?"

The most extreme use of that name which I have found is in another playbill at Harvard College which contains the items shown opposite:

But probably the most curious freaks in the whole museum of the Dickensians are the dramatization of "Nicholas Nickleby," reported by Thackeray in an article in Fraser's Magazine for 1842 and another of "David Copperfield," described by B. W. Matz, in a playbill sent him from Winnipeg in 1906.

Thackeray was full of laughter after seeing at the Ambigu-Comique in Paris a Neekolass Neeklbee, unfolded at a school called "le Paradis des Enfans" in "le Yorksheer." It will be noted that John Browdie, described as a "drover," gives lessons on the clarionet

Digitized by Google

W. 15.] **Edinburgh Adelphi Theatre.** [N. 89.

☞ The Public is respectfully informed that the Two Last Nights of the Performances of the Italian Company are This Evening,

Thursday, August 30, and Saturday, September 1, 1849.

LAST NIGHT BUT TWO OF THE PRESENT SEASON!!

4th Night of the Celebrated Serenaders from St James' Theatre, London,

G. W. PELL, | T. F. BRIGGS,

The Original 'Bones,' of St James' Theatre. | **The best Banjo Player in the World, and**

BOZ'S JUBA

WHO ARE ENGAGED FOR POSITIVELY SIX NIGHTS ONLY.

BOZ'S JUBA, the Hero of Charles Dickens' "American Notes," and the only Youth of Colour ever before the Public. He is thus described by Charles Dickens in his "American Notes for General Circulation."—

"—— Suddenly the lively hero dashes in to the rescue. Instantly the fiddler grins and goes at it tooth and nail;—There is new energy in the tambourine—new laughter in the dancers—new brightliness in the very candles. Single Shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross cut; snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like no thing but the man's fingers on the tambourine; dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wooden legs, two wire legs, two spring legs, all sorts of legs and no legs—what is this to him? And in what walk of life, or dance of life, does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, after having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by calling for something to drink, with the crackle of a million counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound."

Everybody should go and see them.—*Times.* Ditto.—*The Manager.*

At the end of the First Act of "The School for Diplomacy," Messrs PELL, JUBA, and BRIGGS will give the FIRST PART of their

AMERICAN OLIO!

OVERTURE,	- - - - -	**COMPANY.**
SONG, (New,) -	**"Walk along, John,"** -	**BOZ'S JUBA.**
REFRAIN, -	**"Poor Old Ned,"** - -	**Mr G. W. PELL.**
SONG, - -	**"Negro's Courtship,"** -	**Mr T. F. BRIGGS.**
SOLO & CHORUS, (New,)	**"Stop Dat Knocking,"** - -	**JUBA & Company.**
SOLO, - -	**(on the Bones,)** - -	**Mr G. W. PELL.**

Festival Dance--Original--BOZ'S JUBA.

Plantation Dance--Original--BOZ'S JUBA.

Mr PELL would take it as a great favour if the Audience will withhold their Applause until the end of Mr JUBA'S Dances: by doing so, they will hear the exact time he keeps with his Extraordinary Steps.

After the Olio, the Second Act of the Comedy.

Lucy Long, in Character, (Original,) Boz's JUBA.

Boz's Juba Showbill

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

at the school and that the play becomes unduly concerned with Smike (pronounced Smeek). Smeek, having been discovered to be the heir to the nearby Clarendon estates, is hidden in the Cadger's Cavern a thousand feet below the Thames, is rescued by Neekolass and ultimately becomes Lord Smeek.

The discovery by Matz is that a play called "What Women Will Do," by one Harry Jackson, contained the following cast of characters: "Wilkins Micawber, Daniel Peggotty, *Hiram* Peggotty, Uriah Heep, James Steerforth, David Copperfield, *Sheriff Dudley*, Em'ly, Rosa Dartle, *Mrs.* Peggotty, Mrs. Micawber and Wilkins Micawber, Jr." And the program further reveals that one scene—a touch that would have brightened the eye of Crummles himself—was laid in "Em'ly's Apartment in Paris."

These, no doubt, were the worst of them. But surely in the best of them there was something lacking—a falling short that would have made not Mr. Dickens alone but all of us want to lie down on the floor in the corner of the box. They could make a play out of the unended tale of "Edwin Drood," and indeed, in the one they did make, they contrived (rather in the manner of a fellow lifting himself by his own bootstraps) to prove that Edwin was not murdered after all. They could make a dozen plays out of the drama that is in that rushing, sunlit stream of life which he called "David Copperfield." But at best the maker of such drama-

Digitized by Google

tizations is ever a little too much like one who comes beaming from the shore with a pailful of salt water and cries out in the streets: "Behold my version of the Atlantic."

Digitized by Google

SLEIGHT OF HAND

Dickens, who was no mean conjuror, writes his own playbill.

The Unparalleled Necromancer Rhia Rhama Rhoos, educated cabalistically in the Orange Groves of Salamanca and the Ocean Caves of Alum Bay.

THE LEAPING CARD WONDER

Two cards being drawn from the pack by one of the company, and placed, with the pack, in the Necromancer's box, will leap forth at the command of any lady of not less than eighty years of age.

*** *This wonder is the result of nine years' seclusion in the mines of Russia.*

THE PYRAMID WONDER

A shilling being lent to the Necromancer by any gentleman of not less than twelve months, or more than one hundred years, of age, and carefully marked by the said gentleman, will disappear from within a brazen box, at the word of command, and pass through the hearts of an infinity of boxes, which will afterwards build themselves into pyramids and sink into a small mahogany box, at the Necromancer's bidding.

Digitized by Google

⁂ *Five thousand guineas were paid for the acquisition of this wonder, to a Chinese Mandarin, who died of grief immediately after parting with his secret.*

THE CONFLAGRATION WONDER

A card being drawn from the pack by any lady, not under a direct and positive promise of marriage, will be immediately named by the Necromancer, destroyed by fire, and reproduced from its own ashes.

⁂ *An annuity of one thousand pounds has been offered to the Necromancer by the directors of the Sun Fire Office for the secret of this wonder—and refused! ! !*

THE LOAF OF BREAD WONDER

The watch of a truly prepossessing lady of any age, single or married, being locked by the Necromancer in a strong box, will fly at the word of command from within that box into the heart of an ordinary half-quartern loaf, whence it shall be cut out in the presence of the whole company, whose cries of astonishment will be audible at a distance of some miles.

THE TRAVELLING DOLL WONDER

The travelling doll is composed of solid wood throughout, but, by putting on a travelling dress of the simplest construction, becomes invisible, performs enormous journeys in half a minute, and passes from visibility to invisibility with an expedition so astonishing that no eyes can follow its transformations.

⁂ *The Necromancer's attendant usually faints on beholding this wonder, and is only to be revived by the administration of brandy and water.*

Digitized by Google

THE PUDDING WONDER

The company having agreed among themselves to offer to the Necromancer, by way of loan, the hat of any gentleman whose head has arrived at maturity of size, the Necromancer, without removing that hat for an instant from before the eyes of the delighted company, will light a fire in it, make a plum-pudding in his magic saucepan, boil it over the said fire, produce it in two minutes thoroughly done, cut it, and dispense it in portions to the whole company, for their consumption then and there; returning the hat at last, wholly uninjured by fire, to its lawful owner.

*** *The extreme liberality of this wonder awakening the jealousy of the beneficent Austrian Government, when exhibited in Milan, the Necromancer had the honour to be seized, and confined for five years in the fortress of that city.*

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

3 2044 055 056 725

The borrower must return this item on or before the last date stamped below. If another user places a recall for this item, the borrower will be notified of the need for an earlier return.

Non-receipt of overdue notices does ***not*** *exempt the borrower from overdue fines.*

Harvard College Widener Library
Cambridge, MA 02138 617-495-2413

Please handle with care.
Thank you for helping to preserve library collections at Harvard.

HARVARD COLLEGE CONSERVED 11/2001 LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

14 DAY BOOK

NOT SUBJECT TO RENEWAL

Digitized by Google